
OZENESS

Quarterly Newsletter of BRIGHT DAWN: Institute for American Buddhism

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WHACK, WHACK... COMPASSION

by Rev. Koyo Kubose

I have a certain wooden stick on my desk. I want to tell you how I came to keep this stick where I can see it every day. I hope through reading my account, you can somehow apply it as a teaching in your own life.

I found this particular stick in my father's study when we were cleaning things out after my father passed away in 2000. This stick was among many religious artifacts that came into my father's possession over his long career as a minister. I do not know when or where he got this stick. Perhaps it was given to him as a gift. The stick is thin and flat, about two inches wide and eighteen inches long. The stick looks like a paddle since one end is shaped as a handle. The wood looks like hardwood mahogany and the stick looks like an art object because there are pictures carved on both sides of the flat surfaces. One picture is of a boy sitting on an ox. It is obvious that this is one of the famous Ten Ox-Herding pictures used in Zen Buddhism to depict the search for enlightenment.

With this Zen connection and because the stick looks like a paddle, I assume that the stick is a *keisaku*. Maybe it is a sort of ceremonial *keisaku* because it is not the typical kind of *keisaku* used in Zen training halls. The usual *keisaku* is made of plain wood

and is about thirty-six inches in length. The *keisaku* is used by the monk in charge of the meditation hall during long periods of sitting meditation called *sesshins*. During long periods of sitting meditation, a person can get sleepy and his shoulders can get stiff. To help physically and mentally, a meditator can request getting hit on the shoulders with the *keisaku*. When one is hit on the shoulder by the flat side of the stick, the swing used is quite bold and swift, and the resulting sound is a loud "whack!"

The use and purpose of the *keisaku* in meditation halls is not to inflict pain as a form of punishment. The idea of getting hit with a stick may have a negative connotation but the actual experience often feels like a refreshing wake-up call. The *keisaku* is often referred to as a "compassion stick" because it is used as an aid or tool to help the meditator. Also remember that it is the individual meditator, who by putting his hands together in *Gassho*, requests getting hit. And after the hitting, mutual *Gassho* bows are exchanged to emphasize that the act was done with respect and received with gratitude.

The *keisaku* also symbolizes the sword of Majusuri, the Bodhisavatta



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of Wisdom. Statues and pictures of Manjusuri often show him holding a sword, which is considered his sword of wisdom that can cut away ignorance. Thus, requesting the *keisaku* can signify one's sincerity in wanting to spiritually wake up. Experiencing the *keisaku* can be a "nudge" that moves one to travel his or her spiritual path with more earnestness and resolve. These are the reasons I started to consider somehow using the stick I found in my father's study.

I wasn't sure if the stick was actually meant to be used as a *keisaku* or whether the stick was mainly a ceremonial object. Regardless of this stick's original purpose, I felt I could use it as a *keisaku*. I remember someone telling me his vivid memory of when his youth group had a meditation session during a Shin Buddhist conference, and how a minister used one of his shoes as a *keisaku* to whack their shoulders. So, I thought that "getting hit" could be an effective way of maximizing a person's experience, even though a *keisaku* was not being used in the context of a long *sesshin* in a Zen meditation hall. There is no doubt that getting hit and seeing others get hit is rather dramatic and energizing. On the other hand, using a *keisaku* could turn people off if they viewed it as overly dramatic or if the negative aspect of getting hit was not offset by proper explanation of the hitter's sincerity of purpose.

My comments are a background leading up to describing what I did at a Mind/Body Seminar I was asked to lead for the Zen/Shin Sangha at the Midwest Buddhist Temple this past Fall. In preparing for this seminar, I had mixed feelings of whether to use the *keisaku* or not. Some participants might not like the idea and this could sour them on the whole seminar. However, for others, experiencing the *keisaku* could be a significant event that they otherwise might never have an opportunity to experience. So I decided to take a chance and use the *keisaku*.

The meditation session was held in the temple's chapel. The chapel had two sets of pews, with central and side aisles. Meditation was usually done on cushions placed on the floor in the aisles. However, to do what I wanted to do, I had to use a different seating arrangement. I had the participants sit in the pews, but in every other pew. Thus there was an empty pew behind each pew of seated persons. This way I could move into an empty pew and administer a hit on the back shoulder of any person requesting a hit. After everyone was seated, I explained what I was going to do and why. I demonstrated by hitting my wife who had accompanied me

to the seminar. After hitting her once on each shoulder, I asked her, "Now, that didn't hurt, did it?" This elicited some laughter, but not much. Actually, there is a technique of hitting that makes a loud whack sound, but the force of the blow is minimized by a pulling back upon impact rather than hitting into the person. Still, one cannot help but feel a little nervous if one has never experienced getting hit by a *keisaku*.

A bell sounded the start of the meditation period. I walked slowly down the center aisle, holding the *keisaku* in front of me. As I passed each row of seats, persons seated in that row could signal their request to be hit, by putting their hands together in *Gassho*. I then moved into the empty pew behind them and administered one hit on each shoulder. By the time the session was over, perhaps about half of the forty participants had requested getting hit.

The majority of my time during the seminar was talking about and doing other things, but I want to concentrate on describing in this article what I did using the *keisaku*. Although I should mention one other thing I shared with the participants, which was how to use words or a phrase as a "handle" to get a better hold of one's experiences. This is how to use "name it and claim it" as a way to turn a fleeting experience into a lasting teaching.

All of this background will help the reader understand what one of the participants described in a letter she sent me about two weeks after the seminar. She wrote: *Dear Sensei, I kept hoping for the perfect words to express the depth of my gratitude for your many gifts at the MBT Meditation Seminar, but I finally realized that living and acting are better than waiting for perfection.*

My "handle" on the day—especially the earlier session—is "Thwack, thwack, the sound of compassion." From the moment you offered this opportunity, I felt my heart open. Every time I feel this peaceful energy now, I think of the Grinch and when his heart grew three times as large.

During your talk, songs would pop into my head and I realized your words were music to my ears. I felt myself moved—changed—that day, and have now found myself growing and changing in unexpected ways.

(She went on to describe handling frustrating situations with a co-worker. She found that a wider perspective led to greater acceptance and understanding of herself, which in turn, led to compassion and gratitude for her co-worker and life in general.)

She continued, *Now, I work to breathe in peace with every breath and to drink in compassion with every drink.*

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Dear Sensei

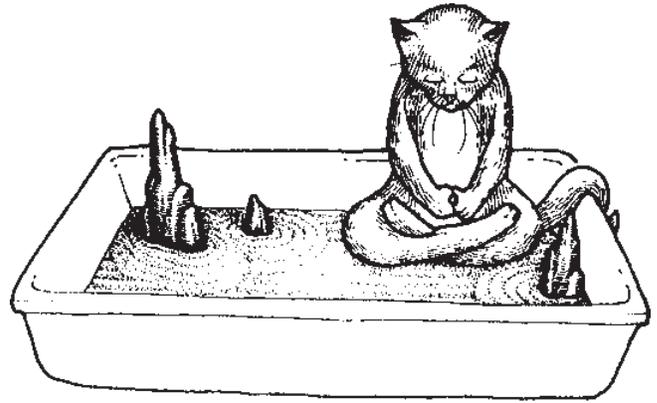
A few years back we had no minister at our local temple, so different members of the congregation, including myself, were asked to give dharma talks on Sundays. As usual, I planned my dharma talk so that I would be ready when my turn came again. Then we got a minister, so I didn't get a chance to give my last one. I feel sorry for my poor little dharma talk that had no place to go, so since you are such a gracious audience I am sending it on to you (enclosed).

A DHARMA TALK I NEVER GAVE

The litterbox is the subject I'll start with today. This may seem inappropriate in this temple with this beautiful altar, but this is Buddhism, which incorporates all of reality, not just the sanitized aspects of it. To me the litterbox is the symbol of the onerous chores we must do every day. No matter if it's raining, we are alive or dead, the world is coming to an end—the litterbox must be cleaned. There are many other uninspiring daily duties, dishes to be washed, dust to be dusted, ad infinitum. We *can* avoid these for awhile. After a wonderful meal we can leave the dishes, cutlery, pots and pans in the sink and go on a six-month safari to Africa. But these things are patient, when we come back they will be waiting for us, with the addition of little furry beings growing on them.

The indication that these tasks are onerous is that when people are born wealthy, or become so, they pay other people to do them. Others are paid to cook, clean, do laundry, watch children, walk dogs, etc. People aren't paid to eat for us, go to the movies for us, or do any of the things we find pleasurable. However, there is one chore that no matter what our economic or social status, we can't pay someone else to do. That is death. No one can be paid to die for us; dying is a do-it-yourself activity.

We may *avoid* death for however long, thanks to modern medicine, genes or karma. But the time comes when there are no more bargains, maneuvers, or arrangements. Then what? The last recourse: Namuamidabutsu, boundless Light and Life, we could do worse. Thank you for listening.
Namuamidabutsu. --SalleaUnger (Arizona)



Editor's Note: Since the writer and I both have cats and in my household I am the one responsible for cleaning the litterbox, I can relate to how she starts her dhama talk. I sent her a picture of a cat meditating in the litterbox and she wrote back, "The picture is priceless and is the Buddhist version of 'If life gives you a lemon, make lemonade:' 'If life gives you a litterbox, make a Zen garden.'"

ON-LINE SANGHA STORE

Visit our Sangha Store (www.brightdawn.org) to get some **holiday gifts** for your family and friends! Get classic books "Everyday Suchness" and "The Center Within" by the Venerable Gyomay Kubose or the 'best seller' "Bright Dawn" by Koyo Kubose. Other neat gift items are the Venerable Gyomay Kubose's calligraphy of a Buddhist teaching mounted on a brocade holder for wall display. How about a mindfulness brass bell set? No home should be without one! Don't forget our Oneness T-shirts, Dharma wheel jewelry, incense burners, and a uniquely crafted eight-sided wooden Dharma Wheel for wall display.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Oneness Newsletter Winter 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.

Reader Replies

I have had the book “Everyday Suchness” by Gyomay M. Kubose for about twenty years now. I even lost the book for a couple of years and then found it at a used bookstore—my own book! The owner gave it back to me. It has become my bible in a sense. I see that you are now on the internet. I look forward to reading more of the books you have available. S.S. (North Carolina)

I really enjoyed your article “Dharma Rocks.” It reminded me of my daughter who passed away 26 years ago. Ever since she was a youngster, she saved rocks, mostly flat ones, and she would paint, draw pictures, and put appropriate sayings on them and give them to her friends. Once she had us take her to Lake Superior where she found many small flat rocks, and she had a ball painting and drawing on them with different sayings. Everyone who received her rocks were happy. Once when I visited Chicago, your dad said to me, “This is what your daughter gave me.” It was a small flat rock with the words printed on it, “The greatest revelation is stillness.” He had that rock for many years and wanted me to have it. I still treasure it. Thank you so much for bringing back such good memories of your dad and my daughter. H.T. (Minnesota)

A couple of things in reference to your article “Dharma Rocks.” It is a Jewish custom to put a small stone on the headstone when one visits a grave. Something universal in this?

Also, I thought the enclosed poem “Stoney Thoughts” might interest you. It is by Lois G Faram of Flagstaff, Arizona and is from *Sandcutters*, the quarterly magazine of the Arizona State Poetry Society. They publish contest winners’ poems there. S.U. (Arizona)

Stoney Thoughts

Stones pave the ground
to be walked on
tripped over
ignored or marveled at
stones are tokens for games
skippers for waves
items for crafts
drainage for plants
stones prop up sagging table legs
decorate gardens
shore up banks
slay giants

stones outnumber people
who look down upon them
stones display no feeling
yet an avalanche produces
more devastation than a mob

to show a path
disguise a grave
decorate a yard
mark a limit
create a work of art
provide a home
nothing matches stones
yet they are commonplace
old as earth
delightful or dismaying
they motivate thought.

Editor’s Note: Dharma Rocks Continued

The article “Dharma Rocks” in our last issue elicited responses from many readers. I received some nice rocks too. I received some rocks from a family that took a driving trip on Highway One (The Mother Road) up the California coast all the way up to Washington. I put some of the rocks they gave me in the door handle recess of my van so that the rocks travel wherever I go because I figure they are “traveling rocks.”

A Buddhist priest friend stopped by to give me a rock he found near Glacier National Park in Montana during a trip this past summer. The rock was red sandstone, layered with a greenish sediment on top. He found the rock in a stream; the rock looked reddish around the edges and under the water, the green looked white. It was the whiteness that caught his eye. When he picked the rock up and looked at it, it was shaped was like the heart-shaped rock pictured in our last newsletter.

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Recently I watched a DVD of the movie “Weatherman” with Nicholas Cage, and Michael Caine played his father who was dying of cancer. In one conversation they talked about the song, “Like a Rock,” by Bob Seager. I looked up the song on the Internet and listened to it; it was the first time I heard all the lyrics. The song is about a man remembering his youth when “My hands were steady; my eyes were clear and bright. My walk had purpose; my steps were quick and light and I held firm to what I felt was right. ...Like a Rock. I was strong as I could be... Like a Rock. I was something to see... Like a Rock. I stood proud; I stood tall; high above it all; I still believed in my dreams. Oh, Like a Rock. Twenty years now; where they gone. I don’t know; I sit and wonder sometimes, where they gone... and sometimes late at night, oh... when I’m bathed in the firelight; when the moon comes calling in a ghostly way, and I recall; I recall... Like a Rock. Standing arrow straight... Like a Rock. Charging from the gate... Like a Rock. Carrying the weight... Like a Rock. Hard against the wind... Like a Rock. I see myself again... Like a Rock.”

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:

- Dec 2 Bodhi (Wisdom) Tree**
Trees as teachers
- Dec 16 Dharma Poetry**
Using poetry as a spiritual tool
- 2007**
- Jan 6 Year of the Boar**
Walk on the wild side
- Jan 20 Spiritual Discipline**
Is your switch on?
- Feb 3 The Power of Gratitude**
Transformative power of gratitude
- Feb 17 Just a Little Bit**
The extra degree makes a big difference
- Mar 3 Seize the Moment**
Everyday empowerment

2007

YEAR OF THE BOAR

For the Animal Calendar, it seems certain animal labels are preferred over others; for example, Boar instead of Pig; Rooster instead of Chicken; Ram instead of Sheep; Rat instead of Mouse; Ox instead of Cow, etc. Although there may seem to be a gender bias working here, I prefer to see it as reflecting “wild” over “tame.”

I remember reading an article titled “Seek the Wild Buddha.” I don’t remember the exact content, but as I recall, the author was making the point of preferring the more “natural” aspects rather than the “domesticated” aspects of things; for example, a more natural garden instead of an overly neat garden. The “natural” aspect of things is less under our human control than aspects of things that we have “domesticated.” The “natural” is less predictable, controllable and reflects more of, well... nature, than things we have shaped according to our own ideas, desires and expectations. There is a teaching here about how to understand and face life’s dynamic, changing reality.



I plan on filling myself with these each time I feel negative emotions coming in. And she concluded with, Who knew that acceptance and compassion for oneself could lead to love and gratitude towards others. Thank you for this wonderful gift. S.K. (Chicago)

It is because of her letter that I paused to think more deeply about the *keisaku*. It is because of her feedback that I decided to start keeping the *keisaku* on my study desk. Her “Thwack, thwack—the sound of compassion” was a nudge that made the *keisaku* a teaching for myself. When a sincere person shares how she is working with the Dharma teachings, it makes the teachings come alive in my own heart.

Now, when working at my desk I see the *keisaku* and think “Thwack, thwack...” which is the handle that brings back all the thoughts and feelings I’ve just written about. It is as though I receive the whack, whack blows myself as a means of personal discipline and motivation for me to do my Dharma work. Heck, I’ve even started actually whacking myself on my shoulders with the *keisaku*. The blows are very refreshing; a sort of self massage. The blows are also a form of self-motivating compassion to tell myself to keep working hard to carry on the Dharma teachings stemming from the karmic connections with my father. What gives all of this even more impact is that the *keisaku* belonged to my father and came from his study. Sometimes it even seems like it’s my father that is delivering the compassionate blows, saying, “Doesn’t that relieve your stiff shoulders!”

DHARMA GLIMPSE

by Shauna Fleuridor

“You have to learn how NOT to multi-task” my husband said, one day, as I was carrying the vacuum cleaner down the stairs, keeping an eye on the food on the stove, thinking that I needed to check my email, work on a manuscript for work, run to the store to buy those diapers on sale, and take a shower, all while the baby was taking a nap.

Well, my husband’s comment made me pause. After a moment of feeling defensive, I thought, “Hey, that’s true; I need to ‘learn’ or practice how to do one thing at a time.” All my life, I prided myself on being efficient and getting many things done. But lately, this hasn’t been working for me—as I’ve been feeling stressed, tired, and getting ill.

So, I took my husband’s advice to heart. I am now more conscious of what I am doing, right in the moment. And, ironically, I find that doing ONE thing at a time is harder than doing MANY things at the same time. This is my new challenge.



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YES YES Your Everyday Spirituality YES YES	
DEC	<p>Theme: A goodbye salute Purpose: To express a heart-felt farewell. Method: With appropriate person and occasion, circle your heart with one hand, tap heart twice, and extend arm out in front of you; do it with power.</p>
JAN	<p>Theme: Tripping with the Eightfold Path Purpose: To travel mindfully with the Dharma teachings Method: Using index finger of one hand, make the sign of the Dharma Wheel in the palm of the other hand. When saying good-bye or wishing someone a good trip, pat him or her on the back with your Dharma Wheel palm, as a wish and reminder to go/travel with the Eightfold Path; e.g. with Right Understanding, etc.</p>
FEB	<p>Theme: Washing-Hands Gassho Purpose: Have a mindfulness moment every time you wash your hands. Method: While soaping up your hands, put your hands palm to palm, clear your mind, breathe deeply and feel the peace. Finish washing your hands with a smile on your face.</p>

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