
OZENESS

ANY WORDS OF WISDOM? RELAX!

by Rev. Koyo Kubose

I was invited to participate in an interfaith event at a local university. I arrived early and sat down to wait in the front row of seats. One of the organizers, a Catholic priest whom I had not met before, sat down next to me. He leaned his shoulder into mine and whispered, "Any words of wisdom?" I replied, "Relax" but before I could say more, someone I knew came up to talk to me, and someone else also started talking to the Catholic priest.

I had intended to explain my comment of "relax" by saying that organizers of an event that is just starting tend to get stressed out. This is only natural since they are responsible for seeing that the necessary preparations are proceeding as planned. Still, it can be helpful to pause and take a deep breath—that is, relax. This is what I meant when I said, "Relax." I was to learn later that the word could also have other implications.

At the conclusion of the event, as I was standing around, the Catholic priest came up to me. He said, "You know, when you said the word 'Relax,' this really impacted me." He went on to say that he began to think about his current job as a university administrator

and whether he was really enjoying his work. Rather than "pushing paper" maybe he would get better satisfaction doing more "hands-on" work.

I had used the word "relax" as applied to the immediate event situation, whereas he applied the word to his broader life situation. This made me think more about the word "relax." Without realizing it, I had said something that was a teaching for him. I had said just a single word, and it's a good thing that I didn't get to explain what I meant by it because he went on to interpret it in ways relevant to his own life. If he hadn't mentioned this to me, I would not have given it any further thought. Because of his example, I began to look at what teachings I could find for myself in the word "relax." I hope some of my musings will also be of help to others.

We should always be asking ourselves, "Am I really relaxed and content in my life?" "What would make me be relaxed and truly contented in life?" There's a book titled, "Don't sweat the small stuff." It sure seems much of one's life is spent worrying or getting upset about the small stuff.

I am reminded of the Japanese word "Takkan" which a Dharma friend called, "the gateway to Satori."

Takkan refers to having a broad, philosophical attitude towards life. I recall reading in a novel, where a person's face was described as very contented, like she had one big decision to make in life, and she had made it. If only we could be like that... to just relax and have a Takkan smile!

Having a broad perspective makes it easier to go with the flow, rather than always fighting against the current. When swimming across a fast-moving river, you might drown if you get too tired trying to swim straight across, fighting the current. Instead, you should swim with the current. You will get safely across, even though it may be quite a ways downstream. One has to use the

please go to **RELAX** on page 3

Inside

No Truth and a Non-Question	p. 2
American Buddhist Services	p. 2
Year of the Rat	p. 2
Book Review: <i>The Essential Shinran</i>	p. 3
Before the World Wakes	p. 3
Reader Reply	p. 4
Dharma Glimpse	p. 4
Retirement	p. 5
Spirituality and Men's Room Humor	p. 5

NO TRUTH AND A NON-QUESTION

By Rev. Koyo Kubose

One side benefit of speaking at a conference is the opportunity to discuss the Dharma with other ministers who are hosting or attending the conference. Here are some insights I received:

One minister told me that he avoids using the term “truth.” He said the concept of truth does not apply to Buddhism. I use the word truth as being synonymous with the word “reality.” That is, the truth of life meaning life’s reality. He felt this was okay but that the word truth is still a loaded term that can cause trouble because truth is usually viewed in some authoritarian context. Different religions may consider their beliefs as the only truth or their approach as the only true way.

Another problem with the word truth is that it implies a static end or conclusion, whereas reality in Buddhism and in life is dynamic and constantly changing. Upon reflection, I may have to re-consider my terminology usage; perhaps it is better to use the word “reality” rather than the word “truth.” I remember telling my children how they might respond when asked, “What do Buddhists believe in?” I suggested responding, “Buddhists believe in the truth.” If this is followed by, “What is the truth?” One could reply, “Every person has to find that out for himself.” These suggestions may be okay for a casual social exchange but actually, the question is inappropriate for Buddhism. It is not so much that Buddhists believe in the truth but rather that we live in accordance with the reality of life, which in the most fundamental sense, we cannot help doing anyway.

I also asked my fellow minister his view of how to answer the question, “Do Buddhists believe in God?” I remember asking the late scholar Masao Abe this question and he explained that the question was inappropriate because Buddhism is non-dualistic, whereas the question is based upon on a dualistic approach of existence vs. non-existence. Even the agnostic position is still based on a dualistic context. Sometimes it is said, “Buddhism neither affirms nor denies the existence of God.” Perhaps a better answer is the one given by my fellow minister who explained the inappropriateness of the question by saying it was like asking, “When the ball is on the 40 yard line, should you punt or swing away?”



American Buddhist Services

The Heartland Sangha holds 11 A.M. Saturday services on the first and third Saturdays of every month at Lake Street Church, 607 Lake Street, Evanston (use courtyard entrance on Chicago Avenue).

Each service is uniquely planned by a chairperson volunteer from the local Sangha. Music and readings from a variety of sources are used. Gratitude offerings of rice, flowers, or other innovative offerings often replace traditional incense burning and sutra chanting. The Heartland Sangha is to be commended for their “cutting edge” efforts in creating these progressive American Buddhist services. As a regular speaker, Rev. Kubose’s Dharma talks are always lively and thought provoking.

For more information, call Heartland Sangha President Asayo Horibe at (847) 869-5806.

2008

YEAR OF THE RAT



Being the first sign of the Chinese Zodiac, attributes of those born during the Rat Year emphasize great leadership and organizational skills. This includes being energetic, versatile, able to find ways around obstacles, and adapting to various environments easily.

During the coming challenging year of 2008, try and emphasize these characteristics of the Rat. Take *Takkan* out of your toolbag. See what else you have in there to help you.

May It Be So.



BOOK REVIEW

The Essential Shinran: A Buddhist Path of True Entrusting. Edited by Alfred Bloom; World Wisdom, Inc., 2007.

Renowned scholar Alfred Bloom presents the teachings of Shinran Shonin, the founder of Shin (Pure Land) Buddhism, the most popular form of Buddhism in Japan, drawing extensively on the writings of this influential Japanese religious reformer.

Instead of relying on second-hand interpretations of Shinran's views on particular topics, Professor Bloom has researched Shinran's original writings to document and compile Shinran's own expressions on various topics. Professor Bloom has provided a valuable resource book.



RELAX continued from page 1
flow, trust the flow. Of course, this applies not only to a river but to the flow of one's life.

Another Dharma friend discussed in a recent article, "Panta Rei" which is a Greek phrase for "Everything flows." This wisdom from the ancient Greeks is similar to the Buddhist teaching of Impermanence, the teaching of constant change. Sometimes in the midst of change, we forget what is truly important, just because we have to deal with the merely urgent. My father, the late Rev. Gyomay Kubose, liked the teaching of "Sufficiency, not efficiency." Sometimes we get hung up on the "best" way of doing things. This can result in becoming neurotic, as well as causing disharmony with others. One way that can help us to relax is simply to pause, breathe, and smile. Even a busy person like the Dalai Lama—why is he always smiling?

A truly relaxed person has his own inner peace. He can function with equanimity even in hectic times. He is patient and can forbear the wrongs of others. As it has been expressed, "The wise person covers his feet with sandals instead of trying to cover the entire world with leather."



BEFORE THE WORLD WAKES MORNING MEDITATION

From Heartland Sangha Notes Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 10

Just before the coming of the pale rays of dawn, Mother Nature exists in a state of flux. Earth's energy is stable, free of the disordered vibrations that are a byproduct of humanity's comings and goings. In these first moments of day, when the sun's golden light is only just peeking over the horizon, our animal mind remains in the land of slumber though we ourselves are awake. Deep sleep has washed away the impurities of existence that accumulated within us, so our mental, physical, and emotional potential is heightened. To meditate in this peaceful yet energetically charged inbetween time is to connect with the divine in an extremely intimate fashion.

In the first glorious glow of morning, the light, air, and energy flowing around us speak in hushed tones of the activity to come. While we recognize that another day of being means becoming once again immersed in the challenges of action and reaction, we also understand that we can draw upon the unique energetic qualities of daybreak for comfort, creativity, and vigor. There is bliss in the simple knowledge that we have been given the gift of another day of existence. We are inspired by sights and sounds of the sun's gentle ascension. Birds serenade the luminosity, which grows richer by the minute. And though we may feel a residual lethargy, our vitality returns as our meditation helps us to become one with the stirring of other beings rubbing the sleep from their eyes. At the start of each day, our destiny has not yet been written, and so there is nothing we cannot do.

How we choose to meditate is less important than our choice to attune ourselves to the spirit of wakefulness that travels round the world each and every day. Even the briefest moment of quiet contemplation in the muted light of the sun can put all that is yet to come into perspective. As a consequence of our daybreak reflections, our lives are imbued with the same stability, tranquility, and increased awareness that humanity has long associated with the stillness of early morning.



Oneness Newsletter Winter 2007

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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 Reply

Dear Sensei,

I heard you speak at our 29th Annual Alberta Buddhist Conference held in Lethbridge, Canada, this past November. You mentioned a “Keep Going” attitude as in always being open to learning new aspects of the Dharma teachings. As you put it, “If you think you know it all, you’re dead.”

After your talk, I came up to you and said, “Sensei, you killed me!” You smiled with a puzzled look until I explained what had happened just before I listened to your talk. My wife was ‘dragging’ me into the conference room. I was thinking to myself, “I’ve been to so many of these conferences; there’s nothing new for me to learn.” Then when during your talk you said, “If you think you know it all, you’re dead,” I thought, “Wow, Sensei just killed me!”

I guess sometimes you have to be “killed” in order to have a new beginning.

R. S. (Lethbridge, Canada)

Editor’s Note: I am reminded of two stories. One is about a student who was attending an awards dinner honoring outstanding high school seniors. Famous scientists had also been invited. This student happened to be seated next to Albert Einstein, not knowing who he was. When Einstein was asked by the student what he did, Einstein said that he studied physics. The student replied, “Oh that, I already took that!”

The second story I am reminded of was told by a faculty member to a group of us graduate students. This was just before we were to take our Ph.D. prelimin’s which are comprehensive exams covering the entire discipline of psychology. The intensive exam period lasts several days. The faculty professor told us that we were at the point when we knew the most we would ever know about the broad field of psychology. After this, each of us would go on to specialize in a particular area of psychology. He pointed out that as we delved deeper and deeper, more and more questions would arise. He said that the more you study something, the less you realize you really know. He said our careers would proceed like this until you finally realized that you knew nothing at all; that’s when you retire!

The professor’s story is humorous but also has an element of truth to it. To a sincere learner/seeker, the emphasis is never on what has been learned and accumulated in the past, but is always on the emerging possibilities. It is in this context that Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.”



DHARMA GLIMPSE

(Note: names used are not actual names)

This summer, my neighbor died.

Single gal, a year or two younger than me: relapse of cancer. Only took a few months. Both Mary and her boyfriend, John, ate the ‘proper’ foods, lived holistically, organically. He had a farm up north and grew wheat grass for the juice. They said they were going to ‘beat this thing’, ‘I beat it 13 years ago, I can do it again!’, she said adamantly.

Lots of anger as the weeks passed and she rapidly declined.

John and I always talked about ‘this, that and the other thing’ over the years. When this came along, it was hard to cut through their increasing anger. My last words to him were, ‘You both had a good life together. When you get back to your place and mow, think of her, and all the good times. Brings a smile to *me* right now.’ We didn’t say goodbye, he just packed suddenly a few days later and left, dropping us an e-mail of thanks. Took a long time for all that anger to leave her house, though.

A much loved choir member is dying in Ohio.

She went down to visit friends, the old church she belonged to. Then something went wrong inside of her. We’ve gotten updates from our choir director these past months. They were very close. During this last Thursdays’ choir rehearsal, Joe showed up, our Assistant Minister. With tears in his eyes, he told us she was in hospice care. They took the tubes out. She was part of the decision. Lots of crying around the choir. We called it a night. Joe asked how I was doing. I said I expected it a while back; said, ‘Life happens ... then it doesn’t.’ It’s such a wonderful mystery. She’s given us some great memories. The smiling’s easier.

How we die is how we live, I guess. We live in anger, we’ll die in anger. Spread love around in life, we’ll die with love around us. Karma isn’t something that just *happens*. It isn’t something *out there*. WE make it. We make this *thing*, and it sticks around after we’re gone. Think about that next time you’re angry ... next time you make someone smile.

A.A. (WI)



RETIREMENT

By Adrienne Kubose

To celebrate my retirement my husband and I went on a road trip across country (IL to CA) visiting points of interest and family members along the way. One of the places we visited was Sedona, AZ. Sedona is known for its beautiful setting, artists and vortexes. I didn't know about vortexes and wanted to experience one so we took a hike to Bell Rock where there are 3 vortexes. This turned out to be a pretty long 2 plus mile hike on a rough trail. Stopping to take pictures and appreciate the view, it took over an hour one way. Towards the end, I was anxious to reach the vortex and looked for signs of it. Eventually I saw short pillars of rocks that I thought must have information. But as I reached the pillars, there was nothing on them, no plaque of information. Some looked like they may have had a plaque at some time but not anymore. There were several pillars spaced several yards apart that I eventually figured out were there to mark the path! The path ended at a large rock that you could climb. The view was magnificent and peaceful. I felt no vortex force whatsoever.



I also visited the Georgia O'Keefe Museum in Santa Fe, NM. I got one of those audio gadgets that take you through the museum. I dutifully pressed the number on the gadget for each painting I stood in front of. It was interesting to hear the background of the paintings/artists. But it wasn't long before I realized I was missing the most important part of the museum

experience: experiencing the art MYSELF. How much more I got from a painting when I paused to really see it through my own eyes and not the audio gadget!

This experience made me realize what a fool I was for expecting the short pillars of rock on the Bell Rock path to tell me what I was looking at there.

I now realize that I'm not in tune with myself. I get my information from TV, reading, radio, magazines, other people, etc. Who am I? What am I feeling, thinking? I need to get beyond allowing my outside world dictate who I am. I guess that's what I'll be working on for the rest of my retirement.



SPIRITUALITY AND MEN'S ROOM HUMOR

By Rev. Koyo Kubose

At a recent Buddhist conference I spoke about Okayness. All Amida Buddha statues have at least one hand in a mudra gesture signifying "fearlessness." This gesture means to have no fear for the Dharma is here. I like to point out that this hand gesture is very similar to the modern Okay gesture, which we use to signify that everything is okay.

The Japanese word for okay is "daijobu." I was intrigued to discover an explanation of the word "daijobu" in a booklet by Rev. Masao Kodani. He says that daijobu "is originally a Buddhist term found in the Nirvana Sutra (section 33) as one of the many names of the Buddha. Daijobu literally means 'person of great health' and referred to the Buddha as the healthiest of the healthy in every way. The Buddhist sense of daijobu is being healthy in a religious sense, the

ability to say Okay to life and death. In general Buddhism it means to become Okay. In Jodo Shinshu it is perhaps more appropriate to say that we are made to see that we are immersed in Okayness."

In the 1970's there was a popular book titled "I'm O.K.; You're O.K." A Shin Buddhist minister quipped that for Shin Buddhists the saying should be, "I'm not O.K., you're not O.K., and that's Okay!" I recall a good Dharma friend, the late Ruth Tabrah of Hawaii, who described one of her impactful life experiences as, "Everything is Okay, even when things are not going okay." The Okay spelled with a capital "O" signifies Absolute Okayness. I have come to really enjoy the Okay gesture and Okayness as good spiritual tools or teachings.

please see **HUMOR** on page 6

In my conference talk I also referred to the capital “O” in the word “Oneness.” I told the story of how the word oneness can become one mess. That is, we want life to be neat and go according to our plans but life has a way of getting messy, which of course, is Okay.

The title of this article is “Spirituality and Men’s Room Humor.” So far, I’ve presented the first apart, which is necessary in order to understand the second part. However, ladies, please do not continue reading if you are easily

offended by “off-color” humor. After my conference talk, which I have summarized above, I was in the men’s room and overheard two men laughing while standing at the urinal stalls. One said, “I just pissed on my shoe.” The other man replied, “That’s Okay; sometimes life is messy!”

Another true episode occurred at a conference in California when I spoke about “Toilet Gassho” as a way of extending mindfulness not just to the common meal-time grace but to other everyday activities. Even while sitting

on the toilet, one can do Gassho and be grateful that one’s internal plumbing is working. During a break after my talk, a man standing at a urinal was overheard, “Say, how does one do Gassho when standing at a urinal?”

Even though these examples may make you shake your head, you still have to smile. Regardless of the grossness, I am always pleased by such remarks because teachings are being applied in personal life situations.

May It Be So.



Acknowledgements with Gratitude

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Donations received after this date will be listed in the next issue.

If we have missed an acknowledgment, please let us know and please accept our apology.

Book List

Book by Rev. Koyo Kubose

BRIGHT DAWN: Discovering Your Everyday Spirituality. The author's early morning run and sunrise viewing over Lake Michigan are related to simple teachings like "wide view" and "keep going" which deepen one's daily spirituality no matter where one lives. Includes map of actual lakeshore path and over a dozen photographs. 152 pages.

Books by Rev. Gyomay Kubose

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. Continues the approach of "Everyday Suchness" and speaks directly to the ordinary layperson. Collection of 58 essays reflects Rev. Kubose's down-to-earth presentation of the Dharma teachings which offers 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. (Temporarily out of print)

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.

Other Recommended Books

BUDDHIST SYMBOLS. Handy brochure explaining common Buddhist symbols. quad-fold.

BUDDHISM: Path of Enlightenment. Simple, concise introduction to basic Buddhism. Teachings are superimposed on beautiful full-color photographs of nature scenes such as water ponds, rock gardens, bamboo grove, etc. 20 pages.

COFFINMAN by Shinmon Aoki. This diary of a mortician invites the reader into the fascinating world of Buddhist Spirituality which sees the extraordinary in things ordinary, mundane, and even repugnant. 142 pages.

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

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RIVER OF FIRE, RIVER OF WATER by Taitetsu Unno. Introduces the Pure Land tradition of Shin Buddhism using personal anecdotes, stories, and poetry. With spiritual insight and unparalleled scholarship, this book is an important step forward for Buddhism in America. 244 pages.

THE FEELING BUDDHA. by David Brazier. A lucid account of how the Buddha's path of wisdom and loving kindness grew out of the challenges he encountered in life. 207 pages.





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DEC	<p>Theme: Personal Rituals Purpose: Using a hand gesture to evoke a spiritual feeling Method: Just as a Catholic can “cross oneself,” a Buddhist can “circle oneself.” One variation is to start with hands together in Gassho, make a small circle with both hands, then end with a bow. Another variation is to do the above with just one hand.</p>
JAN	<p>Theme: Chinese Animal Zodiac Calendar Purpose: Using the 2008 Rat theme for personal growth Method: If you dislike the idea of rats, imagine a friendly white pet rat, Gassho to this image, with the thought of respecting all of life. See if you can Gassho to a sewer rat. Expanding mental flexibility of one’s rigid attitudes is a key aspect of greater wisdom and right understanding.</p>
FEB	<p>Theme: Social Greetings Purpose: Putting a Buddhist twist to the usual handshake Method: Instead of shaking hands, each person extends his right hand, fingers pointing up, puts the backs of the hands together and bows to each other. This could be done putting the palms together, but why spread germs.</p>

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