



## The Four Noble Truths

By Rev. Liz Stout

This dharma talk (given at Heartland Sangha Service on June 21, 2008) is dedicated to the Buddha, whose first sermon after enlightenment was about The Four Noble Truths. It is also dedicated to Rev. Koyo Kubose, he who never hesitated to incorporate bathroom references into his talks.

Do I have the religion for you! One that has as a first principle “All life is suffering.” Wow. I’ll bet you can’t wait to sign up. It’s almost as good as the bumper sticker that says “Shit Happens.” For those of you with Asian backgrounds, there’s another version, “Shiitake Happens.”

But seriously, folks. These are the Buddhist Facts of Life. The next part is: “The cause of suffering is desire.” Following that is: “The cessation of suffering can be realized,” and then, “The way to realize the cessation of suffering is the Eightfold Path” (right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration). Right.

Our Sanskrit word here is *dukkha*, usually translated as “suffering.” Like, “We are in *deep dukkha*.” That there is suffering in the world is no news to us. Just recently people’s homes in the Midwest have been swept away by floodwaters; crime threatens our homes, streets, beaches, and parks; and

the interest rates on our life savings has dropped lower than the fat percentage of the milk we’re drinking. You have only to listen to local news to know there is trouble at our doorstep.

Lest we forget, there is still a war in Iraq, peace is not making huge headway in Israel-Palestine, and monks have been slain in Myanmar-Burma. Suffering. Always, always, there is birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, pain, and loss. This is the human condition that Buddha first observed when he took a field trip away from his ivory tower in the palace.

But these examples are so melodramatic. Maybe the word “suffering” is too strong for what we experience directly and daily. Let’s bring it closer to home. There are everyday situations where we are inconvenienced, frustrated, offended, or ignored. Our buttons get pushed. Things don’t turn out as we planned *and we don’t get what we want*. I can relate to that. Right here is the laboratory for understanding the Four Noble Truths.

Sometimes people try to make you feel better (or worse) by relativizing your pain. Usually this is no help. For example: When I complained that my clothes washer wasn’t working, my so-called friend reminded me that I could be smacking my clothes on a rock by

the riverside. When I bemoaned being bitten by a dozen hungry mosquitoes, she said I could be living in Darfur.

It is much more effective *to catch yourself* in the act of self-centeredness, having unrealistic expectations, thinking that things should never change, hanging on to results instead of letting go, seeking satisfaction in what is intrinsically unsatisfying, and having a sense of entitlement.

Catching yourself is easier if you learn to pull back and notice what your mind is doing, how you are acting selfish, obsessing, or being carried away. Carl Jerome, the Ch’an (Zen) teacher who gave a workshop at our International Buddhism Festival this year, pointed out that meditation breaks the chain of *dukkha*, defined as anytime you get caught in craving, desire, dissatisfaction, preferences, likes and dislikes.

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Meditation draws you closer to unitive, or at least neutral, ground where what *is*, is acceptable.

Two weeks ago another Buddhist sangha (not ours, of course) hosted a soup kitchen in Evanston. Actually, it was the first time a Buddhist group had done that for Interfaith Action and an occasion to be celebrated. Food was purchased and prepared. A hundred hungry and homeless people did get fed. The soup and spills did get cleaned up. That's the big picture. But around the edges there was dislocation, disagreement, and disappointment. A real dharmarama.

Members of that sangha had argued about the menu. There were more packages of fruit than there were peanut butter sandwiches for the bag lunches. Too much money was spent on food because shoppers had not gotten the best prices or remembered their tax-exempt papers. As an IA board member I was invited to "do a blessing" and make the table decorations. The passage by Thich Nhat Hanh that I proposed to read got passed around and some of *those people* didn't like it. Well, Nhat Hanh isn't part of their lineage anyway, thank you very much. I was annoyed because the origami I'd spent weeks making seemed not to be appreciated. Few people took them "home," or wherever homeless people take things. The paper birds fell on the floor, got fingerprinted with spaghetti sauce, and were blown about by the fans. A good question to ask at the time is *What difference does it make?* in the long run?

In addition to meditating, observing your mind, and looking at the bigger picture, you might short circuit desire by making a light joke or composing a haiku. Here are three examples by Lama Surya Das:

Cold day,  
hot soup  
Missing spoon  
  
Toilet paper roll falling  
down latrine hole  
Eek!  
  
No power  
No e-mail  
What to do?

Whatever it takes to help you chill.

Forgive me if I cast an interfaith sidelight on the Noble Truths. Truth has a way of making the rounds. The Apostle Paul in the Christian tradition addresses craving this way:

"But those who want to be rich fall into *temptation* and are *trapped* in many *senseless desires* that plunge people into ruin and destruction." He goes on to say the oft-quoted maxim, "For the love of money is the *root* of all kinds of evil, and in their *eagerness* to be rich some have *wandered* away from the faith and pierced themselves with many *pains*" (2 Timothy 6:10).

Note how similar the keywords here are to the dharma we are considering: *temptation, trapped, senseless desires, root, eagerness* and *wandering* . . . equals *pain*. Hello? It is not money that is evil, but the desire to have it, and the distraction from truth and faith involved in getting it, that causes the suffering and damage.

Realizing the cessation of suffering may be a physical thing as well as a mental practice. Pain is increased by struggle. Earlier this month on vacation in Wisconsin I managed to get my hand stuck in between a dresser drawer and its wooden bar handle. Don't ask me how I could be so clumsy. The point is, the harder I tried to squeeze my hand out, the more my knuckles swelled up. Beside the point is that my roommate just rolled on the bed and laughed. I was imagining having to go down for dinner with a dresser drawer full of socks and underwear hanging from my hand. I needed to relax, drink some cool water, put some on my hand, and gradually work my way loose. Skaters, runners, martial arts practitioners, and others know how to lessen pain by relaxing as they fall because tensing up results in more physical injury.

All life is suffering. This quote by Theodore Rubin came over the interfaith ministers' listserv just in the nick of time:

"The problem is not that there are problems.  
The problem is expecting otherwise  
and thinking that having problems  
is a problem."

So, the end to suffering can be brought about by following the Eightfold Path. That is a future talk (or eight talks) for someone to undertake. In the meantime, do what you can to ease the suffering—big or little—of others, and notice when you are caught up in expectations, wants, and desires.

Treat your mind lovingly, see it as an excited puppy: "There I go again, barking when I should have been quiet." "Oops, I'm running away without the guidance of my leash." "Heck, I'm nipping at the hand that feeds, and I'm pawing with wet feet to reach a tempting treat." "I'm in trouble again." Well, you can imagine other things a just-housebroken puppy might do.

These are the Buddhist Facts of Life. Go now and live it.

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## 21-Day Feedback

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Dear Rev. Kubose

I am only 11 days into my twenty one day agreement and am writing because of a profound experience I had a few days ago while doing my evening Gassho.

I do have a background in Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism so daily practice is not new to me. I formally left my teacher-student relationship 7 years ago though I have practiced silent sitting since.

After finding your site and reading most of what was available on line, I decided the 21 day program would perhaps refresh and revitalize my practice. I very much liked and responded to your ideals of American Buddhism. To tell the truth I thought this simple practice would be a "piece of cake" given my years of long rituals and mantra accumulation. I was wrong.

This simple Gassho Practice has shaken me to my core. The first few days were rather brief simple affairs before my altar (SPOT). I lit candles and incense and after my "harmony" meditation sat for a few more minutes before starting my day. It was a gentle start. And the evening Gassho was also a wonderful way to feel gratitude and relax after whatever had arisen during the day.

I probably didn't plan my 21 day agreement well because I had surgery on the 19th though I began the commitment on the 15th. The next morning I was faced with doing both my morning and evening Gassho in pain, physical pain. That's when I struggled to find a sense of meditation in pain. I did all the lighting of candles, etc and as I slowly spoke the word "Gratitude," that evening, I realized it was a lie. I hurt. I wasn't grateful. I sat there trying to generate a feeling of gratitude."Well, at least you're alive and woke up after the operation." "Well, at least you're better off than most of the world and have a life in an abundant society." "Well, at least you're not in Iraq or Afghanistan."

I listed a dozen things I should have felt grateful for but no matter what I said I could not get past the physicality of the pain. I was pretending to be grateful just for the ritual. I was lying. I really didn't feel gratitude. I just wanted to finish the session so I could make a line on my calendar.

But as I just sat there, I tried to experiment with what were other things, beside the pain, I could focus on as part of just sitting. I began to see how everything I was in physical contact with felt. How my feet felt touching the floor. How my behind felt sitting in the chair. How the hairs on my arms felt when a breeze hit them. The sound of a bird singing in the garden. The smell of dinner baking in the oven. How the light of the candle illuminated a small orb of my butsdan. Slowly the pain just became a part of so much else my body was feeling and my mind was experiencing. The pain actually became part of a "chorus" of feelings and perceptions my life was living. It didn't go away but receded far enough away it created a tiny space. It was a space that I could use. It was a space I could work with. It was a space I could fill with gratitude.

As soon as I found that tiny crevice of inner space I began to smile and eventually chuckle. I finally found a small space that could hold all the gratitude I could muster. In fact I felt that small space was big enough to hold all the gratitude in the world. I can't tell you why but it was a very deep and profound experience for me.

I continue my morning and evening practice, sometimes in pain, sometimes not but always now with the echo of a small vast possibility of finding a space large enough to hold all the harmony and gratitude in the world.-

Kind Regards- MS



Editor's Note: Pain often includes a tiny crack (door or gate) that opens to a vast new "room" (perspective). This kind of experience is exactly what spiritual practice is all about.

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**Glimpse** continued from page 5

can do is go back to the car and get about doing what you need to do next. That's it and I'm grateful to that young woman for the teaching moment. How often they occur at the so-called "low point" in the journey.

—CD



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### Oneness Newsletter Fall 2008

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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.

## Be Your Own Pack Leader

by Adrienne Kubose

Earlier this year we got a yellow Labrador puppy. Shortly afterward I discovered Cesar Millan's "Dog Whisperer" show on the National Geographic Channel. I'm so addicted that I have our DVR set to record the "Dog Whisperer" whenever it's on. Show after show I watch with amazement as troubled, often vicious dogs, most of whom have been misbehaving for years, are rehabilitated within minutes by Cesar Millan. Cesar's mantra is that he rehabilitates dogs and trains their owners (actually he rehabilitates many of the owners in the process).

In many cases the owners have adopted rescue dogs and their compassion toward the dog led them to allow their dogs to do whatever they pleased; or their dog is so cute, they let it do whatever it wants to. According to Cesar, not having a pack leader to structure their lives makes the dog uneasy and can bring out negative behavior. Dogs need to have a pack leader to provide stability in their lives. Cesar shows the owners how to be the pack leader. Much of their training is learning to live in the moment and being calm and assertive.

What blows me away (as well as the owners) is how dogs who have been misbehaving for a long time and to such a level that they are on the brink of being returned to the shelter or even put down, almost immediately become calm and submissive under Cesar Millan's influence. Cesar says that dogs only know what they are experiencing in the present. They don't remember that they were unstable and unruly for years. They just respond to their present reality. Owners need to live in the moment and not let thoughts of the past interfere with the present moment.

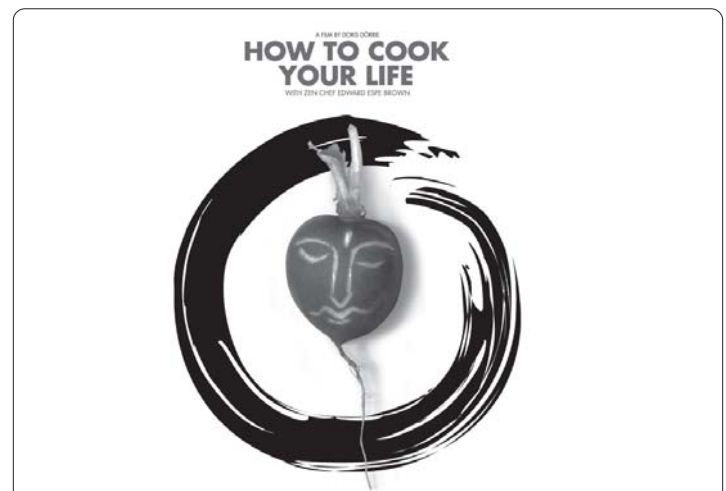
In one episode the owner was suffering from panic attacks so bad that she rarely left her house. The only relief she received from this condition was from the presence of her dog. So she wanted to get her dog certified to be like a guide dog, able to go everywhere with her. She was having trouble training her dog to pass the certification test and called Cesar Millan in to help her. Cesar showed her how to focus on the present to help her train her dog. Her dog passed the certification but better yet, her own condition improved.

What a great teaching this is. Humans are gifted with minds that can see the past and future. This ability has made mankind superior yet this can also be a curse. If we let our mind think whatever it wants to, our lives are like that of the troubled dogs on "Dog Whisperer." We are unhappy. Our

minds dwell on negative past experiences or think about possible future dilemmas and we forget to live in the present. Our minds flood us with thoughts, "That person should have... I could have... What if I mess up... That wasn't fair..."

Learning to be your own pack leader who takes control of your thinking and eliminates needless, irrelevant thoughts (should have, would have, if only, what if) can make a dramatic difference in your life. If we can work to eliminate unnecessary thoughts like these, how much happier and peaceful our life experience will be.

Thank you Cesar Millan.



### Movie Review: How to Cook Your Life

"How to Cook Your Life," (2007, 1 hr. 33 min.) is a documentary about Zen Master Edward Espe Brown, with scenes from San Francisco Zen Center, Green Gulch Farm, Tassajara Center (home of the famous bread book), and places in Austria. Historic footage of Suzuki Roshi is also included. Cooking classes contain lessons for life: the story of the bad pickles, the boy who killed chickens, trying to make biscuits like the kind you get in a roll in the dairy case, the little duck who has religion, the banged up but serviceable teapots, and how a joyful cook affects the food and those who eat it (the Pillsbury Doughboy was partially right). You will love his honest look at our affluence, frustration over opening a shrink-wrapped package of cheese, and the Buddha-faced radishes. Brown's ease with living oozes out with both chuckles and tears. He reminds us what Suzuki answered to the question, "What do you think of all us crazy Zen students?" Roshi said, "I think you are all enlightened until you open your mouths." Why this film is rated PG-13 is beyond me.

—Liz Stout



## Lay Ministers 2008

We welcome Andrew Jiyo Agacki (WI), Ricardo Ryushin Sasaki (Brazil), and John Miyo Wylder (IL) as Bright Dawn Lay Ministers who completed our 2-year Lay Minister Program this year. (Unfortunately, Ricardo was unable to receive a visa to attend the induction so doesn't appear in the picture.) They are busy spreading Bright Dawn Dharma via speaking engagements and forming Dharma groups.

If you would like to contact any of these new Lay Ministers, here are their email addresses:

Andrew Jiyo Agacki	asagacki@hotmail.com
Ricardo Ryushin Sasaki	rsasaki@gmail.com
John Miyo Wylder	bassho@sbcglobal.net



John Sensei and Andy Sensei after Induction

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### References:

Smith, Huston. *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) pp. 99-103.

Das, Lama Surya. *Awakening the Buddha Within: Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World*. (Broadway Books, 1997) pp. 75-89.

Das, Lama Surya. *Awakening to the Sacred: Creating a Personal Spiritual Life* (Broadway Books, 1999) p. 356 (3 haiku examples).

Unno, Taitetsu. *Shin Buddhism: Bits of Rubble Turn into Gold* (Doubleday, 2002) pp. 14, 132, 160-162.



[Contact Rev. Liz at [interfaith@stmarksevanston.org](mailto:interfaith@stmarksevanston.org)]

## Dharma Glimpse

Recently, I drove from Portland, Oregon to the Sierras in Northern California to research a novel I am working on. I spent several days in Gold Rush Country and then travelled south to visit with the Kuboses, who recently moved to Coarsegold. While we were chatting, I happened to say that sometimes humor is all that gets us through difficult spots.

I then proceeded to tell the Kuboses about my second day of travel to California. I had driven from Ashland, Oregon to Sacramento—something like five hours or so and the temperature had risen to 100 degrees, the car had no A/C, I was running very low on liquids to drink, the I-5 freeway was about to detour “somewhere” in Sacramento, my googlemap directions turned out to be useless, the car needed a gas fillup, plus I was hitting rush-hour traffic in the city. In other words, a lot of things were going wrong and I started to question my sanity in driving to California (at least the part away from the ocean) during a summer month. My brain was sluggish and I saw nothing but more to go wrong ahead. Moreover, I still had a few hours of driving left to reach my destination.

I pulled off the freeway and got gas. Then I went into the convenience store because I badly needed some unsweetened ice tea to supplement my meager 8 oz or so of remaining water in the car. I looked all the refrigerator cases up and down and found no unsweetened ice tea. Standing next to me and also having no apparent luck at finding what she wanted was a young African-American woman. Like me, she was busy checking out all the refrigerator cases. Then standing right by my side, the two of us looking at the cool drinks behind the glass and both of us apparently defeated at getting what we wanted, she said, “It’s not happening for me.”

Inside, I could not help but laugh and say Yes! All the tension brought into that moment vanished in a blink. I knew I’d gone into that store to hear those words and immediately left, got in the car and drove straightaway to my destination in the Sierras, Volcano, didn’t miss a turn, and was fine with my remaining water. Rev. Koyo said those were powerful words for me to remember. Those words were what he termed “turning words,” which might in time acquire legs. If so, I might consider using them again. In any case, I had what Rev. Koyo called a “dharma glimpse.” For me, the dharma glimpse suggested reality never quite happens to meet your expectations—it’s an illusion if you think it will. All you

(please go to **Glimpse** on page 3)

## *American Buddhist Services*

### **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, Illinois (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 inno-

vative 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.

For more information, go to [www.heartlandsangha.org](http://www.heartlandsangha.org) or call Asayo Horibe, Heartland Sangha President, at (847) 869-5806.

### **New Dawn Sangha**

meets the second Tuesday of every month at 7:00pm here in Decatur, IL. If anyone wants more information or directions, they can contact Sensei John Miyo Wylder at 217-429-1883 or [bassho@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bassho@sbcglobal.net).

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(Acknowledgments are current as of August 31. Donations received after this date will be listed in the next issue. If we have missed an acknowledgment, please let us know.)

## 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.

**ZEN KOANS.** Commentary on over 200 classical and modern koans. Insights and life teachings applicable to all Buddhists. 274 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. 99 pages. (Being reprinted)

**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

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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.

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<b>SEP</b>	<b>Theme:</b> “Turning Over a New Leaf” Gassho <b>Purpose:</b> To use autumn leaves as a teaching tool for letting go and starting anew <b>Method:</b> Hold one hand in front of you and turn it over, symbolizing letting go of the old and moving on; just like turning a corner, or turning to a new page. Cement this thought by bringing up your other hand and doing Gassho.
<b>OCT</b>	<b>Theme:</b> “Face Gassho:” Improving Social Interactions <b>Purpose:</b> To use idea of Halloween masks in a positive way <b>Method:</b> Cover face with both hands; decide to show a new and better face to the world by interacting with others in a more positive way. Uncover face, smile, and do Gassho.
<b>NOV</b>	<b>Theme:</b> Thankfulness. “Inter-connectedness Gassho:” <b>Purpose:</b> To deepen awareness of interdependency <b>Method:</b> Whenever you want to give thanks that you are the recipient of the result of myriad factors and conditions, do Gassho by interlacing your fingers, still keeping your fingers straight. With bowed head, take three slow breaths.

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