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# OZENESSES

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Quarterly Newsletter of BRIGHT DAWN: Institute for American Buddhism

Vol. 15 No. 1 Spring 2011

## MEDITATION

By Rev. Koyo Kubose

This is an article on my view of the meaning of meditation and the practice or discipline of sitting meditation. It is important to understand the distinction between the terms “meditation” and “sitting meditation.” It seems many people consider the two terms synonymous. Furthermore, some people define being a “practicing” Buddhist as someone who engages in a regular schedule of sitting meditation. How crucial is the practice of meditation to being a Buddhist? Answering this question requires elaborating on several distinctions.

It was a revelation when, some years ago, I read an article by a Zen teacher who explained the meaning of meditation as “being one with whatever one is doing.” In Japanese Buddhism, meditation is called “zen” whereas sitting meditation is termed “zazen.” I later learned another important distinction, that between zen and Zen Buddhism. I am getting ahead of myself. In his article, the Zen teacher analyzed the Chinese written character for “zen” to elucidate the term’s root meaning. The Chinese written character for “zen” is depicted by the photo accompanying this article. This photo is of a painting done by a Chinese artist and was donated to us at Bright Dawn. We had the calligraphy framed and it hangs in our living room.

Chinese written characters are ideograms or pictures. The particular forms and nuances of meaning



evolved over many centuries. The development of a culture can be found in its language. An analysis of a Chinese written character from a spiritual perspective can give insights into Eastern philosophy. Many written characters are compounds; that is, consist of two or more simpler characters. The character for “zen” consists of two parts; in this case, the left side and the right side. The right side of the character means “one, single, simple.” It is called “tan” and is part

of the common Japanese word *kantan*, which means simple (simply); plain(ly); easy (easily); brief(ly). The left side refers to *shimesu* in Japanese which means “to show, indicate, point out, signify, express.”

The above definitions of the two side characters come from the classic character reference dictionary book by Andrew N. Nelson. When the two sides are put together in the term meditation or “zen,” the overall meaning is “to show oneness; to simplify; to reduce to the singular; to become one (with).” Thus, meditation essentially means oneness. The practice of meditation means to be one with whatever is being done. This kind of oneness or meditation in action is when there is total concentration in the present moment. There is no consciousness of oneself as separate from the activity. You forget yourself or lose yourself in what you are doing. In this sense, the subject-object duality

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## IAIDO SWORD DEMONSTRATION

This year we have a special treat during Induction weekend. We are excited to present a demonstration and workshop of Iaido (samurai sword drawing) by Michele Benzamin-Miki Sensei. The event is titled: “The Power of Love.” Weaved through the sword demonstration will be opportunities for the attendees to engage in guided imagery work that empowers them towards a greater understanding of their own power to love. The sword is a symbol of cutting through. Cutting through whatever separates us from connection, wholeness, love. What separates us from love is not found in the external world but within us. Referred to as the poison fires—when we are under the influence of greed, hatred, and delusion it makes it impossible to love. The forms (katas) show the path of non-violence; each draw, cut, is an act of letting the opponent go. In letting the opponent go, greed, hatred and delusion can go. The motivation and intention in each cut is forgiveness and love. Praxis of this form creates the perfect conditions for forgiving oneself and opening to love. Power is the ability to be present in action, and the most important action comes out of love.

Michele Benzamin-Miki Sensei has been training in the martial arts for over 30 years. She holds a 5<sup>th</sup> degree black belt in Aikido through Shoji Nishio Sensei, Aiki Kai, Hombu Dojo Japan, and two different Iaido sword forms, Aiki Toho, through the all Japan Iaido Federation and Soshoryu Iaido a USA based federation. Teaching Buddhist meditation for over twenty five years, she is Co-founder of Ordinary Dharma and Manzanita Village Retreat Center in Warner Springs, CA. She has a dojo in Santa Monica, CA, and Warner Springs, and teaches in affiliate dojos in NY and MN. She is a trainer in NLP and Hypnosis and co-founder of Alchemy of Change, and has an office in Santa Monica where she does deep core change work coaching clients to live on purpose, using the skills drawn from meditation, NLP, hypnosis, and other accelerated learning modalities.

She is a visual artist and performance artist. Her websites are:

[www.manzanitavillage.org/aikido](http://www.manzanitavillage.org/aikido)

[www.hypnosissocal.com](http://www.hypnosissocal.com)

[www.michelebenzaminmiki.com](http://www.michelebenzaminmiki.com)

[www.nlpalchemy.com](http://www.nlpalchemy.com)

She can be contacted at: [mbm@fivechanges.org](mailto:mbm@fivechanges.org) or by phone at: 310 339-3531

Editors Note: Several years ago I saw Benzamin-Miki Sensei give a demonstration. Seeing the sharp sword blade flashing through the air certainly is energizing and focuses one’s attention. In one particular form (kata), Benzamin-Miki Sensei placed an imaginary object waist high in front of her, saying that the object could represent

anything that one wished to “cut.” I immediately thought of a “bad habit” related to one of the Six Paramitas that had been vexing me in my domestic family life. I had been trying to change this aspect of my behavior for many years. With one vertical slice of her sword, I felt an inner change. Seeing the sword demonstration was like adding a final weight on a balance scale that tipped the scale from one side to the other. I was impressed by the power of the sword as a spiritual tool to produce life changes. Every one of us carries around a personal “problem” that is difficult, like a tightly wound knot, to unravel. The image of a flashing sword can slice right through such knotty mental conundrums.

Come experience the power of the sword!

Event: The Power of Love

Date: Sunday, May 22, 2011

Time: 2:00 PM

Place: Bright Dawn Institute  
28372 Margaret Road  
Coarsegold, CA 93614

The public is invited. No charge; donations welcome. RSVP Adrienne Kubose at [brightdawn@kubose.com](mailto:brightdawn@kubose.com) or call 559-642-4285.



## AMERICAN BUDDHIST RESOURCES

The following Bright Dawn Institute (BDI) Lay Ministers can be contacted for information on

1. Local Sangha resources
2. Their experience in BDI's Lay Ministry Program
3. General queries about Buddhism in America

Dave Nichiyo Abatangelo  
Chicago, IL  
dave@dharmacopoeia.com

Dave Merrick  
Madison, WI  
davidjmerrick@yahoo.com

Andy Jiyo Agacki  
Whitefish Bay, WI  
asagacki@hotmail.com

Patti Milligan  
Camarillo, CA  
patti@stenogal.com

Andy Bondy  
Cherry Hill, NJ  
abondy@peccs.com

Dave Teiyo Pangburn  
Brookhaven, PA  
linkpang@verizon.net

Niko Byoyo Burkhardt  
Aurora, IL  
nikoburkhardt@gmail.com

Tokujo Marilyn Robinson  
Grand Junction, CO  
marilyn.robinson88@yahoo.com

Seiyo Thomas De Mann  
Las Vegas, NV  
demannlv@yahoo.com

Ricardo Sasaki  
Belo Horizonte, BRAZIL  
rsasaki@gmail.com

Wendy Shinyo Haylett  
Fairport, NY  
wendyic@rochester.rr.com

Doug Slaten  
Camarillo, CA  
ddslaten@gmail.com

Shirleen Kajiwara  
Chicago, IL  
skajiwara@sbcglobal.net

Sayo Shenphen Sugranes  
Orlando, FL  
sayo.shenphen@yahoo.com

Toyo Teru Katamori  
Worcester, MA  
eastern\_sun\_sangha@yahoo.com

Morris Sekiyo Sullivan  
DeLand, FL  
morris.sullivan@gmail.com

Cheryl Jiyo Kornegay  
Wake Forest, NC  
cckornegay@aol.com

Ken Muyo Swanson  
Whitefish Bay, WI  
muyosawanson@att.net

Mike Shinyo Lawrence  
Canyon, TX  
m\_g\_lawrence@yahoo.com

Jeff WaYo Ward  
Jonesboro, AR  
neabuddhist@yahoo.com

Paul Toyo Mack  
St. Louis, MO  
macks2960@sbcglobal.net

John Miyo Wylder  
Decatur, IL  
bassho@sbcglobal.net

## LAY MINISTER UPDATE

Our fourth group of lay ministers is completing their studies this year and will be inducted on May 22<sup>nd</sup> at Bright Dawn Institute in Coarsegold, California. The students have worked hard for almost two years and will receive a special *okesa* (neck stole) during the Induction Ceremony to indicate they are Bright Dawn Institute Lay Ministers. There is a large boulder within a clearing that makes a nice setting for the outdoor Induction Ceremony. We call the boulder the "Altar Rock."

After being inducted, the lay ministers can join our newly organized Trailblazers which is a net-working resource group that supports the lay ministers in whatever activities they may go on to engage in locally. Lay ministers can also volunteer as Bright Dawn course facilitators helping mentor new students in our Lay Program curriculum.

Because our Program makes use of the Internet and telephone conferencing, students can be located anywhere. The weekly assignments foster wonderful discussions and broaden awareness of everyday Dharma. This immersion in the Dharma leads to Dharma Glimpses that would not have been possible otherwise.

There is still room for a few more candidates in the next group. If interested, please email Adrienne Kubose at [brightdawn@kubose.com](mailto:brightdawn@kubose.com).

### Reader Replies

Dear Sensei,

I am a long-time user of Dial-the-Dharma. The new phone number is working out well. I like how my mobile phone lights up at the end of the message. This is a daily reminder of the Dharma's light of wisdom. I also like the beep sound at the end of the messages; it's like a mindfulness bell.

In Gassho, SG (IL)

Dear SG,

I have to smile warmly at the creative mind that sees the Dharma teachings all around us. Your inspiring real-life examples show how we can live with awareness in all our daily activities.

READER REPLIES continues on page 5

### Oneness Newsletter Spring 2011

Editors: Adrienne Kubose, Rev. Koyo S. Kubose

Phone: (559) 642-4285  
Email: [brightdawn@kubose.com](mailto:brightdawn@kubose.com)  
Website: [www.brightdawn.org](http://www.brightdawn.org)

Dial-the-Dharma: (847) 386-8836  
Live Dharma Sunday (347) 945-7953  
[brightdawnsangha.ning.com](http://brightdawnsangha.ning.com)

Please send Poems, Readers Replies to:  
28372 Margaret Road, Coarsegold, CA 93614

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.

is transcended. This kind of non-dualism is a key aspect of oneness.

The phrase “Just do it!” is not easy to actually put into action. It is not easy to let go of one’s critical, judgmental, always-evaluating mental tendencies. When one does “go in the flow,” it is as though the activity is happening by itself. There is a simple naturalness, often accompanied by spontaneous creative expression. This kind of oneness can be seen in sports (e.g. zen of running, archery, golf, or even in shooting free throws); in the arts (e.g. music, painting, dancing); or when engaged in hobbies or anything one loves doing (e.g. fishing, motorcycle riding, gardening). Of course, all such activities can be thought about, talked about, and analyzed, but such descriptions (as beautiful or helpful as they may be) are still different from the actual doing itself. It is worth emphasizing that meditation or being one with whatever a person is doing means that one can be meditating while cooking, eating, washing the dishes, or taking a crap (excuse the vernacular).

To me, oneness in the spiritual sense is when one “just lives life.” One can be called an artist of life, and live a very creative, meaningful life. In oneness, life is lived naturally, with no pretensions, artificialities, or “should’s.” Every moment is lived one-hundred percent, with no regret. The word “zen” points to Life itself, to everyday suchness, reality as it is. There is a natural purity here. Purity is when something is all of itself, one-hundred percent, and is not diluted or contaminated. It is easy to become alienated from such a natural, pure life. Self centeredness can overpower this original purity; we victimize ourselves and suffer the consequences. The nature of this process or predicament is not easily understood, much less changed or resolved. We need help. Thus, religions and their ritual practices have developed.

Having used the term religion, I wish to turn to another useful distinction; namely, the difference between zen and Zen Buddhism. As the famous Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki points out, zen is life itself, whereas Zen Buddhism refers to a sect or denomination in Buddhism. In Zen Buddhism, the practice of sitting meditation (zazen) is emphasized. To be a Zen Buddhist means that one engages in zazen and other accompanying practices, depending upon the particular sect within Zen Buddhism. The two major Zen Buddhist sects in Japan are Soto and Rinzai, with the latter emphasizing the use of koan study. An individual could engage in regular periods of quiet sitting but this by itself is not zazen, as zazen involves a certain religious context.

Personally, as a lay person I have done zazen in both the Soto and Rinzai traditions in Japan. During a one-year period, I did zazen at Antaiji, a small Soto temple headed by Uchiyama Kosho Roshi. When Antaiji moved from Kyoto to the Japan Sea area, I started doing zazen

at Ryoko-in, a small Rinzai temple headed by Kobori Nanrei Roshi, under whom I did a special kind of koan study for a two-year period until I returned to America because my two young children were approaching school age. Kobori Roshi, having met with my father when my parents came to visit us in Japan, knew of my Shin Buddhist background. For that reason, although I had not wanted nor expected it, he adapted my koan study in a way that was designed toward experiencing the oneness of the Nembutsu.

Today, I do not follow a formal schedule of sitting meditation. This is not to imply that I think sitting meditation is not a helpful or useful practice. If someone wanted to engage in formal sitting meditation as a practice, I certainly would encourage it. Whenever circumstances find me sitting with a Zen group, I find it a very natural, enjoyable experience. However, I do not feel the need to start or lead a group in sitting meditation because there are many other places and teachers that offer such a practice. And most importantly, my path has been shaped by my father’s teachings. His life is a unique expression of both Shin and Zen teachings. The different approaches in Buddhism are like the many beautiful flowers in a garden. I have to be the flower I am; blossoming as fully as I can. How wonderful it is!

There are two kinds of practice: formal, structured practice as contrasted to informal, unstructured practice. Formal, structured practice refers to doing things in a certain way, usually following some particular traditional ritual or form. Informal, unstructured practice refers to being motivated enough to try and apply the Dharma teachings in everyday activities through enhanced awareness. Both kinds of practice have their advantages and disadvantages, depending on the person and the setting. Formal, structured practice provides specific direction regarding what to do and gives a sense of how one is doing. However, when hard effort results in a feeling of accomplishment, it is easy to get an inflated ego and look down on others. Without corrective feedback, any practice has the danger of building up egotistic spiritual materialism. Feelings of excessive self pride of accomplishment are less likely with informal, unstructured practice. However, a drawback of informal, unstructured practice is that it is less clear what one is to do and without feedback, a tendency to lose focus and perseverance. The presence of a supportive Sangha is crucial to both kinds of practice. Practice is “successful” when it ceases to be a means to an end. Instead, the journey itself becomes the destination. Narrow, rigid, goal-directed behavior is replaced by a more free-flowing response to the present moment. This oneness of means-end and journey-destination is not the goal of meditation, it is meditation. As stated earlier, “meditation is oneness.” Oneness is to forget oneself and to be enlightened by all things.



## DHARMA DAN



Here I am with my buddy Kermit. Kermit is known for his saying, "It's not easy being green." Indeed, we, as human beings living on this planet, are faced with many ecological challenges. In our individual homes it is hard to change ingrained habits and develop a more "green" lifestyle. The point has been made that Green Buddhism is a redundancy because interdependency and oneness with nature is such a key aspect of both terms. Rev. Koyo's friend, Rev. Marvin Harada, wrote a great article about the Zen monk Ryokan (1758-1831) who could be called a Buddhist ecologist, even before the word ecology existed. Here is an excerpt from the article:

"Ryokan rejected the regimented, monastic life of the Zen monastery, after living and practicing it for many years. He chose to live in a tiny hut at the foot of the mountains. Ryokan's tiny hut was probably not much larger than many walk-in closets of some large homes today.

"Once, Ryokan noticed a bamboo plant growing under the floor of his little hut. When the bamboo grew to the bottom of the floor of his hut, Ryokan cut a hole in the floor, so that the bamboo could continue to grow. The bamboo plant grew and flourished, but in time, it grew to the ceiling of his hut, and could grow no further. Ryokan then cut a hole in the roof of his hut, so that the bamboo could continue to grow taller and taller. Ryokan's regard for the bamboo plant didn't allow him to cut it or let the floor or roof hinder its growth. He literally lived with the bamboo, and enjoyed watching it grow and flourish. Cutting a hole in his roof meant that the rain and cold would enter his hut, which must have been freezing cold, being close to the mountains.

"In the summertime in Japan, mosquitoes are abundant with the humidity and with all the ponds and rice paddies in the country. People would sleep with mosquito nets during the night because of the many mosquitoes. Ryokan would sleep with a mosquito net, but he would sleep with his leg out of the net, so as to

feed the mosquitoes. How can anyone do something like that? Ryokan had such regard for all forms of life that he even offered his leg at night so that the mosquitoes could bite him and feed off of him.

"As a monk, Ryokan lived off of the donations and offerings that he would receive from people when he went begging with his bowl into the village. He would receive food from people. Ryokan would never waste any food, and would keep his leftovers in a bowl. The food would begin to spoil and then maggots would grow on the food. In the wintertime, Ryokan would put the maggots under his covers so as to keep them warm in the freezing cold.

"We might feel that we should be more 'green' or ecologically minded in our life, but I doubt if there's anyone in this world that can live as 'ecologically' as Ryokan did. Such a sense of ecology comes from his enlightened sense of the oneness of life. Ryokan saw the nobility of life in all things, in the bamboo, in the mosquito, and even in the maggot."

Rev. Harada ends his article on Ryokan by noting that he became a wonderful poet and calligrapher, and includes some of Ryokan's poems. Here are two of them.

How can we ever lose interest in life?

Spring has come again  
And cherry trees bloom in the mountains.

The bamboo grove in front of my hut  
Every day I see it a thousand times  
Yet never tire of it.

Well my dear readers, Kermit has a message for you. You don't have to live exactly like Ryokan did but we can be inspired to live more green and shine our own little corner in whatever ways we can. Even more than ever, when I see Kermit I will be reminded of Ryokan and think of the color green. Frogs are closely associated with Buddhist monks because frogs know how to fold their legs and meditate on the lily pads. Kermit and Ryokan are Dharma buddies and both say that the Buddhist color is green.



READER REPLIES continued fromn page 5

Kubose-sensei,

I've been meditating on Rev. Akegarasu's counsel to your father. It is nearly a perfect haiku as you worded it.

Here's a haiku in his honor ...

"Don't preach Buddhism  
unless you want to kill it.  
No, live the Dharma."

Gassho, AI

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(When submitting donations, please list your name exactly as you wish it to appear in the Oneness newsletter. Acknowledgments are current as of **March 9, 2011**. Donations received after this date will be listed in the next issue. If we have missed an acknowledgment, please let us know.)

**WHY MEMORIAL DONATIONS?**

Not only is making a memorial donation a way to remember and honor a loved one, it is a karmic action that fosters awareness of the two main Buddhist teachings of Impermanence and Interdependency. Acknowledging one's "roots" nurtures a feeling of gratitude, which is the foundation of a spiritual life. A memorial donation does all this and at the same time helps support the mission and activities of a worthy organization.



## Book List

### Book by Rev. Koyo Kubose

**BRIGHT DAWN: Discovering Your Everyday Spirituality.** Describes the author's daily morning ritual and how ordinary things and activities can deepen one's spirituality. 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." Collection of 58 essays of down-to-earth teachings for a richer, more meaningful life. 134 pages.

**THE CENTER WITHIN audio cassette;** 3 hours.

**AMERICAN BUDDHISM.** Covers a brief history of Buddhism in America, 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. 99 pages.

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

**ENGAGED PURE LAND BUDDHISM:** Essays in Honor of Professor Alfred Bloom. Challenges Facing Jodo Shinshu in the Contemporary World. Edited by Kenneth K. Tanaka and Eisho Nasu. 360 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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*Change Service Requested*



**YES YES Your Everyday Spirituality YES YES**

<b>MAR</b>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Spring  <b>Purpose:</b> Connecting Spring themes to spiritual inspiration  <b>Method:</b> Shout Gassho: Whenever you see or feel spring, visualize your one-handed Gassho as an exclamation point to your silent (or not) shout of affirmation, Yes! Be inspired by nature's irrepressible show (shout) of life.</p>
<b>APR</b>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Gardening  <b>Purpose:</b> Promoting spirituality when watering plants  <b>Method:</b> Watering-Plants Gassho: Using both hands, water with a circular motion. Be reminded of all of nature's cycles; e.g. the seasons, seed-fruit, and in human life too.</p>
<b>MAY</b>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Plants  <b>Purpose:</b> Relating plant growth to personal growth  <b>Method:</b> Planting Gassho: Whenever you do or see any planting, pay homage to the miracle of growth; e.g. acorn to mighty oak tree, tiny seed to large, juicy, red tomato. Apply the idea of Dharma seeds to your own life.</p>

**Mailing List Update:** If you are already on our mailing list and wish to remain on the list, no action is necessary. We are happy to continue sending our newsletter to all interested persons. If you know someone who would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, please email us at [brightdawn@kubose.com](mailto:brightdawn@kubose.com) or indicate below and send to: Bright Dawn Institute, 28372 Margaret Road, Coarsegold, CA 93614.

Please add to your mailing list      Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please remove from your mailing list      Address: \_\_\_\_\_