



O n e n e s s

Quarterly Newsletter of BRIGHT DAWN CENTER of Oneness Buddhism

Vol. 17 No. 1 Spring 2013

YEAR OF THE SNAKE

Editors Note: Now that the Chinese New Year has been observed and we are well into 2013, here are three messages that relate the snake theme to Dharma teachings and spiritual growth. The first is an insightful Dharma Glimpse given by Shirleen Soyo Kajiwara, on the Live Dharma Sunday February 24th broadcast. The second is by Sayo Shenphen Sugranes who as the host of that Sunday's broadcast, gave a wonderfully rich commentary on the snake theme. The third message describes some self-reflective thoughts by Rev. Koyo .

Dharma Glimpse **by Shirleen Soyo Kajiwara** (Lay Minister Class of 2011)

Tomorrow's full moon completes the 15-day Chinese New Year celebration welcoming in the year of the snake.

Like all animals, snakes are portrayed as both wise and manipulative, good and evil in myths throughout history. We tend to gravitate towards one side or the other depending on our own attachments, perspectives, causes and conditions. Whether we see snakes as scary and manipulative or cute and flexible, we definitely approach snakes very cautiously, respectfully.

There is much we can learn from embracing snakes just as they are.

Like the snake we should regularly shed old skin that has become restrictive to growth, including ideas or concepts that have turned into dogma, past good or bad deeds, shame and guilt.

It's important to remember that like some snakes, we can make poison within ourselves in the form of ignorance, greed or anger. With awareness, we can carry the poisons without being sickened or killed by them and without striking or harming others with them.

Snakes have incredible spines allowing them to both climb and fall without injury. If we cultivate our inner strength and flexibility, we, too can navigate difficult times more smoothly.

Snakes smell with their tongues. Our awareness can increase when we learn to use our senses in different ways, like listening with our feet or tasting with our eyes or smelling with our tongues.

All snakes, with or without poison can bite when startled, threatened or hungry. Under certain conditions, we can all be dangerous; we all have the potential to strike out. Respectfully acknowledging our dangerous side, our fears, keeps them within our awareness, within

our ability to direct.

Embracing the Year of the Snake, like embracing our whole selves means accepting the yin and the yang, the beauty and the danger, the power and the responsibility, the oneness within ourselves and in all things.

Best wishes to everyone for a happy and healthy Year of the Snake.

Commentary **by Sayo Shenphen Sugranes**

(Lay Minister Class of 2010)

2013 is the year of the Snake. I like snakes. Others fear them as venomous creatures. But I have always felt like the snake has gotten a bum rap! A very misunderstood creature, the snake can offer us so many Dharma teachings.

To some he personifies the symbol of darkness, of the devil. And to others, the snake represents fertility or a creative life force. We also find the caduceus, featuring two snakes

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around a winged staff, as a symbol of medicine; and of course the ouroboros, a symbol of eternity and continual renewal of life -- a representation that reminds me every moment is the beginning and every moment is the end.

In Buddhist mythology, the snake is a protector. During my time living at a Thai temple, I always admired the long and menacing looking Nagas that guarded the entrance to the temple. Every morning I would pet them and thank them for their protection of the temple. Also of note is the great teacher and scholar Nagarjuna. Nagarjuna, credited with founding the Madhyamaka school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, is said to have received his name after having recovered teachings from the Nagas that protected them. Hence the name Nagarjuna. In his depictions, one can see the Naga king protecting him.

In a letter, Rev. Koyo shared his insights on how he viewed the snake. He explained that, for him, the snake is flexible and that we should have the same flexibility in our minds. I completely agree. In this world of change, it is wise to develop a "snake mind" or flexible mind able to adapt to the changes in our lives. We can also see how a snake can fit and become one with its terrain. It is comfortable in any surroundings. Be it a rock, water or sand, a snake makes due with its environment.

Snakes are truly gentle creatures. Even when we look at the rattle snake, whom many fear, is actually very courteous in that when frightened, it gives us a warning. It will tell you: "Hey! You're in my comfort zone!" Perhaps we can learn from the rattle snake and develop an inner "rattle" that warns us when we might become angry, upset or even violent. Or when we are thinking of striking back at something that makes us uncomfortable. Listen for the inner rattling.

A story I have always enjoyed was that of the wanderer who was walking through the forest. It was dark and he could not see in front of himself. He came upon something that looked like a big black snake. Fearing it might bite him he took his walking stick and beat the snake in fear. But when the light came pouring from the sky through the trees he realized that it was only rope! This story tells us how light, wisdom, can shed misconceptions about what we see in life. It also teaches us that not all things are what they seem. But when light enters our path, we can see things as they really are.

So don't fear the snake! We can learn so much from these reptilian creatures: a spiritual friend that teaches us so much when we remove our conceptual thinking and accept the snake as a teacher. Happy Year of the Snake!!

Rev. Koyo's Thoughts

Since moving to the Sierra Nevada foothills in Central California five years ago, Adrienne and I have been enjoying our new lifestyle on a five-acre wooded property. We share this nature paradise with wild critters such as coyotes, tarantulas, rattlesnakes, as well as rabbits, squirrels, and many members of the rodent family.

Whenever I describe to others all the types of wild critters we have on the property, the strongest reaction is to the mention of rattlesnakes. Everyone agrees that rattlesnakes are the most dangerous aspect of living in the foothills. After several years of living with the reality of the rattlesnakes presence, my fear reaction has lessened. Yet, the topic of rattlesnakes is always serious, and getting bitten could be a life and death matter.

With all this as providing a background context, I recently thought about rattlesnakes as I lay in bed one morning. I was born in the year of the snake; so every twelve years my special year cycles around. For 2013 I decided it was time to get serious about certain aspects of my spiritual growth. I suppose this is no different from the usual making of New Year resolutions, but I made it more serious by pairing my resolution with rattlesnakes. I thought, "Isn't this a matter of life and death?" After all, time is slipping by and I am not getting any younger! "Wake up! Get serious!" I turned my resolution into a vow, and hope that my intention becomes a reality. As the weather warms up, perhaps I may even encounter a rattlesnake Bodhisattava to remind me!

BTW: You can listen live to Live Dharma Sunday every Sunday by calling (347) 945-7953 at 8:00 AM Pacific Time or listen to past archived broadcasts by either going to <http://brightdawnsangha.ning.com/> where the past 5 shows are listed or enter <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/brightdawnsangha/YYYY/MM/DD/live-dharma-sunday> where Y is the year, M the month, and D the day of the show you want to listen to.



WELCOME SPUNKY AND CAM

By Dharma Dan



I am happy to introduce two new members of the Bright Dawn Center family. A yellow-striped Tabby named Spunky because that's the way he acts; and a sleek female named Cam because her fur color looks like camouflage. The two five-month old kittens are now half grown. They and our two dogs have gotten to know one another.

The Golden Retriever, Raku, is especially interested in Spunky and must think Spunky is a toy because he carried Spunky around happily a few times by the midsection, feet dangling. Sometimes when Spunky is inside a box, Raku would grab a leg and try to drag him out.

Every day Adrienne takes her mother for a walk around the property and at the same time uses the Chuck-It launcher to toss balls for the dogs to chase. Spunky and Cam usually are following along too. They scramble around the moss-covered boulders and are good at climbing up and down trees.

When Rev. Koyo whistles, the cats know it's meal time and they come running. Their feeding place is in the garden area because they are supposed to hang out and guard the garden from mice and gophers. We'll see. In the meantime, they are helping with the Spring planting. As Rev Koyo was planting a row of garlic, he looked back and saw Spunky following along, digging up the newly planted garlic!

Well, this is Dharma Dan, your behind-the-scenes reporter, signing off. I'll keep you posted on whatever lessons are provided by the daily doings of life here at the Bright Dawn Center.



Spunky



Cam

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The purpose of the Bright Dawn Center 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

CALL TO A FRIEND IN NEED

by Roberto Keiyo

She sounded out of breath as she spoke, and her sentences ran over each other as she explained her e-mail to me. You see, she had sent me a Christmas E-mail card and with it a post script which said “I need to talk to you, I’m depressed and need help.”

I took this as something serious and so I was able to get in contact with her. I listened to her tell me all that was going on.

“My only child has moved away to college, and I have been unable to work due to my fibromyalgia and we just moved into this part of Southern New Jersey, I can’t find a Buddhist temple I can go to and I haven’t been able to meditate for over a year, can you help me?”

I kept quiet for a few seconds and said “well I don’t think there is anything I can do, but I will say this, can you breath?”

“What?” she replied.

I repeated it once more I said, “Can you breathe?”

She said “Of course I can!”

“Then let me hear you take a deep breath.”

“What good is that to me?” she said.

“Well,” I responded, “I just want to hear you do it.”

And so I heard her breathe in and breath out. “That’s great now, do it again.” And once more she took a deep breath and then exhaled.

“Now from what you’ve told me,” I said to her, “it sounds as if a lot of things are going on in your life since we last spoke and there is nothing I can do to make you feel better, but there is a lot you can do to help yourself. The first is to hold on to your breath, by this I mean breathe slowly and naturally and watch it, just for a few moments, no big thing, just do that for a few minutes each day and then look to see where it goes.”

She was silent as I continued speaking, “We all have these moments in which it seems that all these events seem to pile up and come crashing on us like a ton of bricks. But when you feel these events are overwhelming you, just breathe. That’s all, just breathe.

“But,” she said, “I feel as if I’m losing myself.”

“Just breath,” I said, “just breath. If you can do that, then you will be mindful of it coming and going. Just like all the stuff going on in your life it comes and goes. We can’t hold on to all this stuff because in reality there

is nothing to hold on to and no matter what happens your breath will not let you get lost. The breath is your anchor, if you want to call it that. Just be mindful of it and it will give you the space to see.”

“I see,” she said, her speech now normal.

I was quiet and we were both silent for a while before we spoke.

“Tell me, is it cold?” I asked her.

“Oh yea,” she said, “the temperature was at 14,” she said.

“Sounds like a day for some hot tea,” I said.

She laughed, “Yes I should make a cup”

“Has it snowed?” I asked.

“There are flakes beginning to fall,” she said.

“Well why don’t you make some tea and watch the flakes fall and just breathe. The best meditation I know is just to breathe and drink tea.”

She laughed again.

“Now I must walk the dogs before they beat me up.” And we both chuckled.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Shoo,” I said, “ain’t no big thing,” I replied. “I’m just an ear to listen that’s all.”

We hung up and I did a gassho to the phone. “Thank you for the teaching master,” I said as I got up and grabbed the leashes. The dogs barked to remind me to be mindful of them too and I said, “good Buddha dogs,” and walked them out.

DHARMA GLIMPSE

by Michelle Jouyo

One of my favorite photos of my dog Faust is of him in obedience class. While all the other dogs are sitting and looking at the instructor like good dogs, mine is looking back at the camera.

Faust is a one-of-a-kind dog. I adopted him from the local animal shelter when he was about 6 months old. He had an impish gleam in his eye and one ear that stood up when he was getting ready to do something wrong. He was (still is, actually) defiant, willful, and sometimes destructive. Despite 6 weeks of obedience training, he obeyed commands only when he wanted. While training him to sit, he’d obey until he got bored and decided to go wandering off to look at something.

We all have a Faust. He lives in our minds and causes us frustration. When we sit on our cushions, does

Glimpse continues on page 5

our mind sit with us? Or, like Faust, does it wander off to look at butterflies? What many of the monks sometimes call “monkey mind,” I like to call “puppy mind” because training your mind is a lot like training a puppy. Sometimes, when it wants to, it will behave and you’ll have what people like to call a “good meditation.”

I think, though, that the real “good meditation” is when your mind acts in a defiant manner. It’s called “training” your mind for a reason. Those times that you have to struggle to come back to your breath, those are the times you are getting some tangible benefits. Why? Because we aren’t training our minds so that we can have a good meditation (though that’s a nice benefit), we are training our minds so that we can bring our minds back when we are off the cushion.

It’s easy to be calm and compassionate when you are sitting on a meditation cushion. It’s another thing entirely when some guy cuts you off in traffic, or you have to deal with screaming toddlers at a restaurant. Those are the times that your “puppy mind” really needs to be reigned back in – to bring your mind back to where your compassion lives. Maybe the guy that cut you off in traffic is racing to the hospital due to some emergency, or the screaming child might be tired or teething. These people are all suffering as much as you are, and being able to “tug the leash” and recognize that is part of the reason you are training your mind.

Faust, when he wants to be, is a really good dog. Sometimes we just need to remind him of that. Our minds are no different. We just need to be reminded that sometimes we need to sit rather than go chasing butterflies.

Editor’s Note: Both Roberto and Michelle are currently enrolled in our Lay Ministry Program. Part of every weekly assignment is the sharing of personal experiences and teachings. We thought our newsletter readers would also enjoy examples of what is reported in their class sessions.

To share happiness.
And to have done something good
before leaving this life is sweet.

--Dhammapada

READER REPLY

Dear Reverend Kubose,

I just finished reading your book *Bright Dawn*. It was entertaining and inspirational, and I want to thank you for sharing your wisdom and caring. You have given me a new perspective on how to bring spirituality into my life. I have been making an attempt to do so for several years now, but have felt unsuccessful and dissatisfied, and even angry. I’ve been expecting the world to change somehow to suit me just because I express gratitude. Now I will work to live a truly grateful life; to understand that “The effects of daily spiritual practice are gradual, cumulative, and not necessarily dramatic.”

Prior to reading your book, I was feeling particularly discouraged and upset. Several incidents occurred in which people were thoughtless and hurtful in significant ways, and I kept questioning, “Why do people treat each other this way? Don’t they see that if we work together in harmony, we all shall benefit?” I focused on my frustrations and sadness, could not sleep, was not hungry, and thought only of ways to “teach” these people (especially those who were having an impact on my son’s life!) that their behavior was causing pain. One night I picked up your book, which had been a Christmas gift to me from my sister, and began to read. I felt a smile cross my face as I read about “Toilet Gassho,” and a sense of peace came over me as I reached the end of your book. I shared specific aspects of your book with my son to help him understand and cope. He, too, seems more at peace, although his feelings of betrayal will take a bit of time to fade.

There are many things I tell myself intellectually to help me manage life’s difficulties. But my ego and a certain self-righteousness have been obstacles to finding true spiritual peace. I am now working harder on myself to let go of my pride and expectations of others and to sincerely appreciate all my blessings rather than simply speak hollow words of gratitude. I want to be a better role model for my children, and your philosophy is so beautiful in its simplicity that I now have a plan and the tools to help myself and them find our own “*Bright Dawn*.”

Peace, DMF



“The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly. Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today. The point of power is always in the present moment.”

-- Buddha

Your worst enemy cannot harm you
As much as your own thoughts, unguarded.
But once mastered,
No one can help you as much,
Not even your father or your mother

-- Dhammapada

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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.

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.

DISCOVERING BUDDHISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE: by Marvin Harada 2011. In commemoration of his 25 years of ministry at the Orange County Buddhist Church, over 40 essays by Rev. Harada were selected from past monthly newsletters. 128 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.

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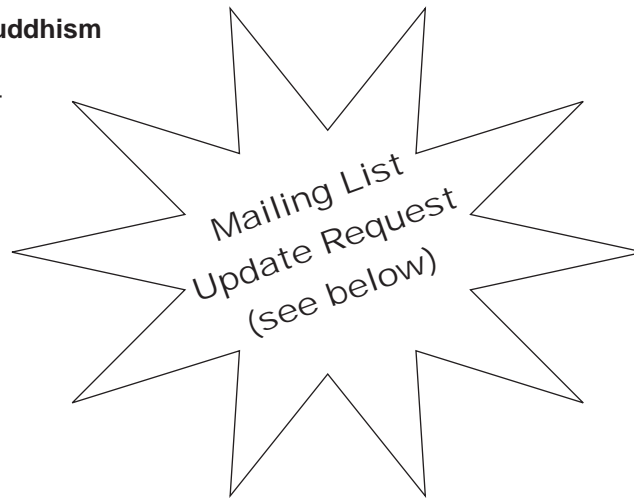
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THE FEELING BUDDHA. by David Brazier. A lucid account of how the Buddha's path of wisdom and loving kindness grew out of the challenges he encountered in life. 207 pages.



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YES YES Your Everyday Spirituality YES YES

MAR	<p>Theme: Nipping anger in the bud Purpose: To see the arising of one's anger, and mentally pausing. Method: "Rattlesnake-Gassho:" Shake your open hand back and forth like it has a tremor. Think how a rattlesnake rattles as a warning when it feels threatened. Use your hand tremor/rattle as a warning to yourself to pause and not react in anger when you feel "threatened."</p>
APR	<p>Theme: Channeling/blocking anger Purpose: Providing an alternative to a full-blown anger reaction. Method: "Fist-Gassho:" If the above tremor gesture does not defuse your budding irritation, make a fist and squeeze hard for five seconds. Then release the tension and relax.</p>
MAY	<p>Theme: Letting go of anger Purpose: Providing a way of throwing away or cutting away one's anger before it boils over. Method: "Scissors-Gassho:" Starting with a fist, make a-throwing-away gesture, except extend only the index and middle fingers and use them as a scissors to cut through the root of anger. Those two extended fingers can also stand for a victory sign that celebrates the prevention of an anger reaction, or as a peace sign that expresses your internal intention.</p>

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