
O N E N E S S

Quarterly Newsletter of the Rev. Gyomay M. Kubose Dharma Legacy Vol. 3 No. 1 Spring 1999

THE CENTER OF LIFE

By Ven. Gyomay M. Kubose

"I know that we should be thankful to our mothers but I cannot be thankful to my mother because she did not do much for me. My parents were divorced and I did everything by myself. In fact, my mother gave me more hardships and sufferings than good. What have I to thank her for? How could I?" This statement was made by a very intelligent young man. I asked him whether he is happy as he is now; and further I asked him whether he feels a real joy or gladness in life and is able to say, "I am grateful to be alive." His answer was, "No."

Unless we are thankful to ourselves now, we cannot be thankful to anyone. Even if this young man's mother had done much for him, I do not think that he could really be thankful to her, for he cannot be thankful to himself as he is now. On the other hand, if he found himself, and lived a meaningful and grateful life, he could not help feeling thankful to his mother, who gave him life, regardless of what she has or has not done for him.

In ordinary moral life and modern utilitarian point of view, if some-

one was kind to us then we express our thankfulness. This is to say, if we receive some benefit, then we express thanks and appreciation. This kind of human relation is nothing but business-like "give and take."

In the world of truth, religion, and love, it is altogether different. In fact, it is the opposite. The starting point is not mother or any external things but ourselves. If we are saved now, our whole past will be saved. Our "salvation" goes backward into the past. If we find meaning in our lives now, then the whole world becomes meaningful just as when we are cheerful, the whole world is cheerful. The real meaning of "I pledge myself to strive for the Enlightenment of all beings" is the attainment of our own enlightenment. Shinran Shonin said that he did not recite the Nembutsu for his parents, but when he is able to recite the true Nembutsu, he is a worthy son of his parents.

Buddha's world is the world where we transcend the world of duality and become one. To the above-mentioned young man, the prob-

lem is not what his mother did but that she is the one who gave him life. His mother and he are not separate in the world of truth; they are one. The world and we are not two but one. The world is you and you are the world. As long as we think dualistically, we will have problems.

Coming Events

❖ **Discussion Class** Discussion classes on Taitetsu Unno's book "River of Fire, River of Water" will be held in April. A Home Study Option is also available. For details, see p. 5

❖ **Ti Sarana Ceremony**
The Ti Sarana Confirmation Ceremony will be held on March 20, 1999. To register, see p. 6

❖ **American Buddhist Services**
Rev. Koyo Kubose gives Dharma Talks on the first and third Saturdays (11:00 A.M.) of every month at Heartland Sangha services held at the Lake Street Church; 607 Lake St., Evanston, Illinois (use courtyard entrance). For more information, call the Kubose Dharma Legacy at (847) 677-8211.

President's Message

The Serra Retreat Center is located on a hilltop in Malibu, California, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The Center belongs to the Franciscan Order, whose founder was St. Francis of Assisi who espoused a life of poverty and simplicity. The resident friars pointed out the irony of having as neighbors such Hollywood celebrities as Mel Gibson, Charles Bronson, and Dick Van Dyke. Nevertheless, I experienced powerful insights during a 3-day Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue Retreat held at the Serra Center last October. Let me describe one experience.

The retreat participants were 30 Buddhists and 30 Catholics. Although we had name tags, our religious affiliations were not listed on the tags. There were several Asian Catholics and many of the Buddhists were Caucasians. It was not easy to identify who was who. Of course eventually I learned who were the Buddhists and who were the Catholics.

At one discussion session, a Catholic priest asked the other Catholics whether they thought as he did when seeing an example of Buddhist compassion, "there's the Holy Spirit in action." He put this in the context of how as a Catholic priest, he saw the entire world as "catholic." For

him, the ocean, hills and sky even the sea gulls flying around the Serra Center were "catholic." Several Catholics immediately expressed their displeasure with his remarks. They felt it was arrogant and insulting to rename everything Buddhist as Catholic. Something Buddhist should be understood and respected in its own right. One 'earthy' Catholic sister said that the Buddhists here must be thinking, "What the f— is going on?!" (She didn't say the F-word but only the first syllable.) We all laughed and I don't think any of us Buddhists were actually insulted by what the priest had said. The "incident" stimulated lively discussion during the rest of the retreat and this I believe was the main intent of the priest, who was one of the retreat organizers.

My own introspection moved from the aspect of labeling seagulls catholic to the act of judgmental labeling itself. Wasn't I guilty of this? Didn't I automatically label each retreat participant as either Buddhist or Catholic? This was not just a neutral kind of factual labeling but showed my need to put all the Buddhists into a box labeled "my side" and all the Catholics in another box labeled "the other side." This self-realization was so powerful that I shouted to

myself, "What the f— am I doing?!" My image of myself as an open, liberal person was shattered. I did not meet other people "empty-handed" and have genuine encounters with them. I did not approach people as human beings who happened to be Catholics or Buddhists but I dealt with people only in the context of "ism's" and stereotypes. When interacting, there was not a real person in front of me, only a concept of my own making. I was not meeting an individual and accepting him as having unique, absolute value.

During the retreat at the Serra Center in Mailbu, I learned something about interfaith dialogue and about meeting another person. I share this teaching because religious affiliation and identification can be such divisive forces. There will never be world peace until there is harmony among the world religions. I implore everyone never to give up hope; do not become cynics. Let us look within our own hearts, and in the spirit of St. Francis, "seek more to respect than be respected; seek more to understand than be understood; and seek more to love than be loved."

✿ Editor of this issue
✿ Shauna Kubose
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✿ Rev. Koyo S. Kubose
✿ Managing Editor
✿ Adrienne Kubose

Oneness Newsletter Spring 1999

Please send:
Dharma Glimpses ❖ Poems ❖ Reader Replies
Summer issue deadline: April 30

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Dharma Glimpses

by Kanon Kubose

Hello, everyone! My name is Kanon Kubose, and I am Rev. Koyo's son. I'm one of the editors for this newsletter, but this is the first time I am writing an article for it.

Recently a friend introduced me to a new musical artist named Liz Phair, and I liked her instantly. There was something about the way the angst-filled lyrics (with an occasional swear word) combined with a powerful rock and roll beat that captured my attention. I found many of her lyrics to be inspirational to me, although, as it seems to be with a lot of music now days, any meaning I derived from it comes perhaps just as much from within myself as from the artist. In her song, "Shane," Liz Phair has a section where she repeats:

*You gotta have fear in your heart...
You gotta have fear in your heart...
You gotta have fear in your heart...*

over and over in her brooding, husky voice, and the lyrics touched me somehow. At the time I didn't really know why they had that effect on me, just the vague feeling that there was wisdom there.

I began to wonder why should I have fear in my heart? My answer is that without such fear, we could lapse into a state of spiritual lethargy.

To illustrate, imagine a person who lives each day according to a routine he's developed unconsciously over the years. He gets up at the same time, eats the same thing for breakfast, catches the bus at the same time to go to work, sees the same people there, talks about the same things, etc.. Nothing different ever challenges him, and he has a sense of security, perhaps not much excitement either, but he is content to live this way, never challenging himself to go beyond.

First, let me say that there is nothing wrong with this kind of lifestyle. On the contrary, a sense of security is very important. However, for a person who is a truth seeker truly interested in spiritual growth, one should feel fear at times.

The reason for this is that in our search for the truth, we will come upon things, realizations about ourselves or the world that are new to us. We may not understand these insights fully and fear them because we naturally fear the unknown. They may threaten our

little world we've created for ourselves, throw us for a loop, and make us want to crawl back into it and forget these new conflicting ideas.

I try not to do this. This is the choice I have made for my life. A long time ago I realized that the spiritual journey is often full of difficulty and decided that it was worth it. Have fear! It means you are growing.

It is not easy. Fear is a powerful thing, coming from the center of our most primal being. One feels fear for a good reason. The Tao Te Ching describes the "ancient masters" thusly:

*They were careful as someone crossing an iced-over
stream
Alert as a warrior in enemy territory*

These lines clearly indicate that the wise men of old understood the value of fear. The stream needed to be crossed, and the war needed to be fought. Careful, yet not stopped by fear, these masters found the proper balance. This is what made them masterful, for the balance, so hard to find, also keeps shifting!

There are streams and enemy territory in our lives too, and only we can decide for ourselves when they need to be crossed or crossed into. This is why it is not easy. It would be foolish if the ancient master crossed the stream when he believed the ice would break. We too must make this kind of assessment.

Balance bravery with caution—a difficult combination! Feel the fear. Assess. Then decide, and if you decide to go ahead, do it, no longer letting fear hold you back. Caution, wise initially, may become a shackle. You must know the difference.

On the other hand, if you find that nothing in life frightens you, perhaps you need to look a little deeper. We all have insecurities! We all have aspects of ourselves that we are not proud of. Perhaps we'd like to be more outgoing in public, more friendly. Perhaps we fear expressing our opinion at work or telling others about an idea we have, afraid of criticism. It would be easy to go through life avoiding facing these fears, but maybe we decide that the risk is worth it. I don't know about you, but I feel a lot better facing them.

As the wise have said: "Tis better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all." They've also said "Look before you leap." Both these adages of ancient wisdom I found rolled into the single lyric of Liz Phair.

READER REPLIES

SQUARE TO ROUND

Avoiding concepts and dogma
Living with noble embodiment
From innocence to unencumbered
Time is untouchable ... End faces beginning
Fun turns sad ... Warm feels cold
Words are flexible ... Man must bend

by: GDI (IL)

DEAR SENSEI

Dear Sensei,
What is the role of "faith" in Buddhism?
WO (IL)

Dear WO,
Faith, in its usual meaning, does not apply in Buddhism. It is misleading to say that Buddhists have faith in the Buddha—where faith is a kind of blind trust in something objectified outside of oneself. Instead, a person has to look within and find the Buddha's life in one's own life. If this is done, then "faith" is nothing other than a clear realization of Truth itself.

Dear Sensei,
Thank you for the "Oneness." I look forward to reading and learning from every issue. My late mother enjoyed Rev. Gyomay Kubose's talks, saying, "They had depth and truthfulness." I am inspired and guided by his "Suchness." He is, indeed, the admirable teacher. Namu Amida Butsu.
MO (PA)



Seasonings



sayings to add a little flavor to life

Failure is the first step to success.

Hard work is a better horse to ride
than genius.

Discipline is remembering
what you want.



Views of Spring

Haiku poems and commentary are from "*Haiku, Volume 2, Spring*" by R.H. Blyth; Hokuseido Press, 1950.

**At every gate,
Spring has begun
From the mud on the clogs.**

Issa

To see the beginning of spring in the black mud that sticks to everyone's *geta*,— this especially belongs to Issa. Up to the present, the mud has seemed only something dirty and unwanted, but as the harbinger of spring the mud now is not seen as an inconvenient and ugly thing, but as a delicate happiness for everybody.

**Lighting one candle
With another candle;
An evening of spring.**

Buson

The original means "lighting one light with another," probably a candle. There is here some mysterious meaning, like that in the propagation of the species. The torch of life is handed on from parent to child in a way which everyone knows but no one understands. The transmission of fire is equally obvious, yet is an eternal mystery. Beyond this, in the moment of suspense when the flame of one candle gives birth to that of another, the inner meaning of spring, of the spring evening, is apprehended. There is something passing from here to there, a glow, a steadiness in the warm dusk, something so deep and delicate that we feel it to be life itself trembling and intangible, yet strong and apparent to all the senses.

**People coming, people going
Over the spring moor,—
For what, I wonder?**

Shiki

This is not a question; it requires no answer. Indeed, when we realize that this kind of thing, and all kinds of things are questions that need no answer, are answers that correspond to no questions whatever, then we are enlightened, then ours is the real poetic life; all things have a meaning, but a meaning that is neither a question nor an answer, yet deeper and more poignant than either. These people, of all ages, occupations, costumes, some walking swiftly, others dawdling, others plodding,— we have the whole of the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Plays of Shakespeare* on a single road across the moor in spring. Yet again this is a poem of spring. All these people, unknown to the poet and unknown to one another, are an expression of an aspect of spring, its mysterious, upspringing vitality.

Book Review

The book, *River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism* by Taitetsu Unno, was reviewed by Rick Fields in the 1998 Fall Issue of the Buddhist periodical, *Tricycle*. Fields points out that Pure Land Buddhism spread from India to other Southeast Asian countries to become the most widely followed school of Buddhism in the world. It has been present in North America longer than any other school, having come with early Japanese immigrants in the late 1800's.

Regarding the Shin Buddhist tradition of Pure Land Buddhism, Fields says, "At first glance Shin might seem puzzling to Westerners who have grown up in the meditation-powered traditions of Zen, vipassana, and Tibetan tantra. All these, at least as practiced recently in North America, are based on achieving liberation through a strenuous, even athletic, meditation practice." In contrast, the Pure Land approach "does not depend on practices of any kind—neither ethical, meditative, nor devotional..." The approach involves a total entrusting to great compassion as represented by Amida Buddha which is the spiritual power experienced as understanding and caring in our lives.

Fields states, "Perhaps the most appealing aspect of Shin Pure Land then, is that it is so user—that is to say, human—friendly. Because there is no possibility of achieving anything (except perhaps a decent human life) by one's effort, we can all relax. Since Amida's vow includes all our thoughts, good and bad, and failures and conflicts, the result— or perhaps more accurately, the side effect—is acceptance (and knowledge) of who and what we are and not who we would like to be or pretend to be..."

Relaxation and acceptance of our foibles ("our foolishness" Shin calls it) leads to tolerance of others' foibles as well. The resulting unassuming laid-back view can in turn provide a much-needed antidote for the uptightness of too many American Buddhists."

In the Acknowledgements of his book, author Taitetsu Unno mentions that "the idea for this book came from Trace Murphy, editor at Doubleday, who felt a strong need for the aspect of compassion in Buddhism to be more widely introduced to the general public. He thus invited me to write on Pure Land Buddhism for the interested reader who has had some acquaintance with the other better-known forms of Buddhism, such as Zen, Tibetan, and Vipassana. In order to meet his request I have kept the tone nonacademic and incorporated personal anecdotes, stories, and poetry from various sources."

Because of this approach and Unno's engaging style, the reader can relate to the material on a personal, emotional level. With spiritual insight and unparalleled scholarship, this book is an important step forward for Buddhism in America.

Ti Sarana Ceremony

This spring marks the first annual ceremony in which participants receive a symbolic head shaving and a Buddhist name. This formal act of commitment serves as a reminder of one's priorities and provides motivation for the continuing development of one's spiritual life. If interested in participating, please fill in the registration form on the next page by March 15th.

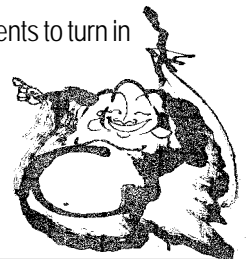
Legacy Events

Spring Discussion Class

A series of three discussion classes will be held on Taitetsu Unno's book, "River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism." (See Book Review) The classes will meet from 2:00 – 3:30 p.m. on three Sundays: April 4, 11, & 18 at Rev. Koyo and Adrienne Kubose's residence: 8334 Harding Avenue in Skokie (one block east of Crawford and ½ block south of Main). To register, use form on page 6.

Pages 1-85 will be covered on April 4th; pages 86-153 on April 11th, and pages 154-209 on April 18th. To help readers interact with the material, the following Study Guideline is recommended: For each of the three sections of material, do two things: (1) Write down at least one new insight or realization, include any particular sentence or phrase that particularly struck home; and (2) Write down at least one question or aspect that you would like discussed; e.g. a particular passage you didn't quite understand.

Please prepare and bring these written comments to turn in at each class. (What! Too much pressure? If so, feel free to come and just hang with us, but know that your "personal spiritual trainer" will whip you with a wet Dharma noodle).



HOME STUDY OPTION

If you cannot attend the above discussion classes, you can still participate in a Home Study of the same book. Follow the above Study Guideline and send (e-mail, fax, or mail) your written comments to us by each meeting date. You will receive back commentary and samples of how others interacted with the same covered material.

Use the form on p.6 to order the book and/or register for either the Discussion Classes or the Home Study option. Deadline is March 31, 1999.

TI SARANA CEREMONY REGISTRATION FORM

A Ti Sarana Confirmation Ceremony will be held on Saturday, March 20, 1999, 11:00 a.m. at the Lake Street Church (607 Lake St., Evanston, Illinois). This layperson ceremony is open to anyone who wishes to confirm his or her religious identity as a Buddhist and receive a Buddhist Name. Interested persons should complete and return the form below by March 15, 1999 or call (847) 677-8211.

Name: _____ Tel (_____) _____

Address: _____
City State Zip

Please return completed form to: Kubose Dharma Legacy, 8334 Harding Avenue, Skokie, IL 60076.

RIVER OF FIRE, RIVER OF WATER REGISTRATION FORM

Discussion classes will be held on Taitetsu Unno's book, "River of Fire, River of Water" from 2:00 – 3:30 p.m. on three Sundays: April 4, 11, & 18 at Rev. Koyo Kubose's residence (8334 Harding Avenue in Skokie, Illinois). Interested persons should complete and return the form by March 31, 1999 or call (847) 677-8211.

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Copy of the book, "River of Fire, River of Water" _____ copies @ \$12 = _____

Check one: Registration fee for the three discussion classes _____ persons @ \$15 = _____

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LEGACY CATALOG

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.

THE CENTER WITHIN. Continues the approach of "Everyday Suchness". Collection of essays reflects Rev. Kubose's unique, down-to-earth presentation of the Dharma teachings which offer to all people a richer, more meaningful life.

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.

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.

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

HEART OF THE GREAT WISDOM SUTRA. (Translation and commentary). This sutra deals with the teachings of non-self and nothingness.

Highly Recommended Books

INVISIBLE EYELASHES by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. Combines time-honored Buddhist teachings and stories with examples from modern life to show how flexibility of mind helps us grow spiritually.

OCEAN: AN INTRODUCTION TO JODO-SHINSHU BUDDHISM IN AMERICA by Rev. Kenneth K. Tanaka. Answers questions frequently asked by non-Buddhists.

RIVER OF FIRE, RIVER OF WATER by Taitetsu Unno. Introduces the Pure Land tradition of Shin Buddhism using personal anecdotes, stories, and poetry. This practice is harmonious with daily life, making it easily adaptable for seekers today.

Acknowledgements with Gratitude

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Oneness Newsletter

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Your Everyday Spirituality

MAR	Theme: Serenity Purpose: To promote calmness when stressed, bored, unable to sleep, etc. Method: "Dharma Breathing:" Take 8 slow breaths representing the 8-Fold Path; if needed, continue with 6 breaths for the 6 Paramitas; 4 for the 4 Noble Truths; 3 for the 3 Treasures; and 1 for Oneness.
APR	Theme: Be Here Now Purpose: To release obsessive thoughts that interfere with being in the present moment. Method: "Throwing Away Gassho:" Start in traditional Gassho position of hands together in front of heart; rotate fingertips back toward yourself; keeping fingertips together, spread heels of hands apart. Then quickly thrust fingertips forward away from body, exhaling vigorously.
MAY	Theme: Dynamic Tranquility Purpose: To center oneself and promote mindful awareness. Method: "Oneness Gassho:" Start in traditional Gassho position; raise hands high over head while inhaling; lower arms sideways while exhaling; bring hands together at navel. Repeat. Do everything very slowly.