Earlier this year I had the great fortune of being invited to a Setsubun Festival along with a traditional Kito Blessing at a Nichiren temple in Los Angeles. The Nichiren Shu Beikoku Betsuin is a temple with a rich one hundred year history and has a beautiful Bodhi Tree on the property, making it such a wonderful sight in the midst of such a busy city. As part of the Spring Festival, Setsubun has a special ritual to cleanse away all the evil of the former year and drive away disease-bringing evil spirits for the year to come. This special ritual is called mamemaki (“bean scattering”). Little white envelopes containing “lucy beans” were tossed at members attending the service while chanting: Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi! (“Demons out! Luck in!”). The service also included chanting an invocation, readings, and chanting sections of the Lotus Sutra. They also chant the O-Daimoku, or the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra, Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. The sound felt to reverberate throughout the whole universe. It was a feeling of oneness. This activity made me think about my life and connection to all other beings in the world. We each have a beating heart. A life drum beat that goes on until the end. Each heartbeat plays to the tune of the person. Sometimes fast, sometimes slow. But nonetheless, we all have this beating drum within. It plays out to the universe, connecting us beyond all of time and space. As I played the drum and chanted, I took a moment to breath and feel each beat. Each beat was the best, and last. Each beat had power, beauty, and an infinite quality! Beyond all dualism, my beat joined the beat of everyone else that was playing along and chanting. Our voices became One. Our beating became One. And suddenly, there was only One beat! One voice as we chanted. It was one of the most spiritual and awakening experiences I have ever had. It was One beat, One Sound. All differences vanished. We were not American, Japanese, priest, or lay. We were all One. Untied by each individual beat. In life we forget how connected we are. One great web of universal life! Beyond all things that divide us, we are simply One Beat, One Sound. Together, playing along the great cosmic beat. Let us all listen to the One Beat, beyond dualism, playing harmoniously in the great symphony of Oneness!
LET THE WHOLE SANGHA BREATHE AS ONE BODY
by Gretchen Saijo

Breath flows onto shore from one ocean many waves parasamgate.

At the Salt Lake Buddhist Fellowship our Sunday service begins with centering and breathing together. The deep bell is struck and led by Christopher Kakuyo Sensei, our awareness is focused on the present moment. I need the reminder. While everyone else seems to be still, as children I am too often distracted; did late-comers just arrive, will they find a place to sit? Did I forget anything for the altars? I am brought back to my body, reminded (in the best Buddhist sense) that there is nothing to do. “Breathing in . . . breathing out . . .” and the unified exhalation of 100 people sounds like a wave breaking softly on the shore. We were separate, now we are not. The sound reminds me of a teaching from Rev. Koyo Kubose in Bright Dawn: Discovering Your Everyday Spirituality: “Individual human beings are like waves in the vast ocean. Each wave that rises up from the ocean, will also return to the ocean. It lives its life flowing along the ocean surface. When a wave ‘dies,’ it goes back to the ocean from where it originally came. Actually to talk of coming and going is misleading because at no time is any wave ever separate from the ocean.” “Nothing exists as a completely separate, unchanging entity. A finite human being is never separate from the infinite. An individual life is one with Universal Life, just as a wave is one with the ocean.” These thoughts and the sounds of Sangha are a reminder of Interbeing – from the furthest ancestor who exists in my DNA, to the Earth with her oceans and air that support my individual life. Perhaps I could be less the driven, foam-topped crashing breaker and more the gentle swell, close to the sea. Breathing in . . . breathing out . . . the bell-tone washes over us tolling: “All beings, one Buddha nature.” Gassho.

Komical Karma

After such an intense winter, the humans of the Northern Hemisphere will be so excited that it’s finally spring!

And to think that I was excited about spring’s arrival.

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During my little meditations, subjects and people come into my mind. Without a great deal of effort I kind of let go of that image or idea and try and return my thought to the breath or mantra. The thought of texting and the way we might read or interpret a text that we receive on our phones “came in for a landing” last week. I tried and eventually let go of the thought during practice but then remembered it and reflected on it afterwards. Maybe I didn’t totally let it go for a reason. It seems (for me at least) maybe I’ve read someone’s short text message to me and instantly somehow become offended (I have). How dare this person give me such a short, trite and disrespectful response via text! Well, first we need to remember that that is exactly what text messaging was intended for. Short, brief responses in order to quickly send little messages. It’s not intended to be your email. Even if it is an actual email here in this age of electronic communication, we simply don’t know what is going on with the sender. We don’t know what’s going on with the receiver either if we are the sender do we? We might get upset about not receiving a quick answer or response. Very sincerely, there have been emails and text and phone messages that I have just missed. I didn’t mean to, I just didn’t see them until many days later. What a slacker I guess, but I keep up with a personal email account, 2 works accounts, 2 cell phones - it really is ridiculous I think. I might respond to the person and say something like, “I’m sorry I didn’t see this until just now”... That’s why I tell friends and colleagues, at least for how I’m wired, if it’s super important and you need an answer right away - call me and ring the phone off the hook! We all have to make adjustments for our situations, ages, strengths, weaknesses, etc. but that’s another article for another time. As for our electronic communications, we all know it is now literally immersed in our American lives and for many people around the world. I text my friend in Belgium all of the time. It’s here and it will get more of it, and not less. So back to our text message Glimpse. I have to be very mindful when reading any kind of electronic message on my phone or computer. Some of course you shouldn’t even open if it looks suspicious but I’m not referring to that. It’s about mindfulness in this new age. Be mindful BEFORE sending a message. Reflect on what you know about the present situation with the receiver and be mindful. When you receive a message, DON’T TAKE OFFENSE! Read the message mindfully. If it’s shorter than usual or maybe more to the point than usual don’t assume it’s about you or that something is wrong. It probably isn’t. If it is don’t worry - you’ll find out when it’s time. Things are much different in this day and age than it was just 30 years ago but as our times change as Buddhist we have to learn to change too. Happy Losar (Lunar New Year - Year of the Metal Rat) Loving Kindness!

Seasonings

sayings to add a little flavor to life

“Springtime is the land awakening.
The March winds are the morning yawn.”

-Lewis Grizzard
NEMBUTSU
by Christopher Kakuyo
Namu Amida Butsu is Nembutsu
It is the call of Buddhas to put everything down.
We need only one thing . . . less.

So stop torturing yourself
with all those made-up stories
of who you think you are

and aren’t, regardless of who
you are or are not, regardless
of what you have done

or have left undone.

Namu Amida Butsu
Namu Amida Butsu
Namu Amida Butsu
Namu Amida Butsu

Let us attend to each other
right now, right here
Let us attend to each other

to our own funerals
to our own births
in that order

Namu Amida butsu

Do let us attend to each other,

to our lives
to all of life,
as it is,
as you are

Right here
Right now.
Namu Amida butsu

RAGGED BUDDHA RAG
by Ginny Geiyo
Buddha was so blue
He turned off the news
Couldn’t take a snooze
It was so awful

So he got off his mat
Said “How about that!
Time to hit the road.
Do something lawful.”

So he walked to town
With his half smile half frown
Glowing
From top to bottom

Oh, man! He was pissed!
When you’re mindful
You can hiss...
So he let it rip, let it freefall

No denying, hats went flying
Knots of lies he was untying
From shore
To shining shore

And when he was done
He just straightened his bun
And sat and sat
And sat some more

And Buddha is us
So get on or off the bus
And do what you can do
Here and now

May it be so

Haiku Corner
Unconditioned Moon Freedom
Peace Blowing Out
Dukkha Dreaming Nirvana

-William Toyo
All things on earth, both living and non-living, are worthy of respect. For humans, the bias of perceived superiority over non-human animals, is the major obstacle to greater understanding of the reality of Oneness and interdependency. How humans use language illustrates the lack of respect toward other non-human entities. To generalize, all human beings have personal names, whereas other things, both animate and inanimate, are usually called by the impersonal pronoun, “it.”

In an article, Speaking of Nature, Robin Kimmerer says, “We have a special grammar for personhood. We would never say of our late neighbor, “It is buried in Oakwood Cemetery.” Such language would be deeply disrespectful and would rob him of his humanity. We use instead a special grammar for humans: we distinguish them with the use of he or she, a grammar of personhood for both living and dead Homo sapiens.” Kimmerer goes on to say that when it comes to non-human inhabitants in the cemetery, like a bird, a squirrel, or a tree, the sentence is “It lives in Oakwood Cemetery.” “In the English language, a human alone has distinction while all other living beings are lumped with the nonliving “its.”

She further elaborates and points out that Native Americans and earlier ancient peoples used a grammar of animacy. They were closer to nature and considered themselves a part of nature. Rituals like greeting the dawn or appreciating rain show that such aspects of nature were not taken for granted. Indigenous people often went even further and recognized other animals as their relatives. For example, when a hunter killed an animal for food, he said something like, “Thank you brother deer; your life was taken so that I may live.” Another kind of illustration is that farmers rarely gave names to farm animals that they knew they later were going to eat. On the other hand, pet owners all give personal names to their pets and consider them family. Names matter.

The “take for granted” way modern people relate to objects in their personal environment leaves much to be desired. Rev. Gomyo Kubose often reminded the children in his congregation to treat their shoes with respect. Telling them not to kick off their shoes and leave them scattered all over. Instead, he said that when you take off your shoes, place them neatly side by side. He would go on to teach them to appreciate their shoes, telling the children to pat their shoes and say, “Thank you my little shoes… you protected my feet all day…” Another example is once when one of Rev. Koyo’s sons was a teen-ager, he said that he didn’t feel he was a very spiritual person. Rev. Koyo, knowing that his son was really into cars, said, “When you get into a car and sit behind the steering wheel, don’t you have a feeling of gratitude?” His son said, “I sure do!” and Rev. Koyo said, “That’s spirituality!” These kinds of teachings may start out being about a specific thing but naturally lead to increased awareness of how one relates to all aspects in one’s everyday life.
Acknowledgements with Gratitude

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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.


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


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, a bamboo grove, etc. 20 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.

THE ART OF TAKING ACTION by Gregg Krech. Draws on Eastern philosophy, Buddhism, Japanese psychology, Zen, and martial arts to offer an approach to ACTION that goes beyond productivity and time management. 216 pages.

5-MINUTE MINDFULNESS JOURNAL by Noah Rasheta. A few minutes is all it takes to transform your day. The 5-Minute Mindfulness Journal helps you live mindfully with quick, thought-provoking practices and writing prompts to bring peace, calm, and happiness to your day. 136 pages.

NO-NONSENSE BUDDHISM FOR BEGINNERS by Noah Rasheta. Presented in a straightforward conversational style, this book provides the groundwork you need to begin-or continue - your exploration of Buddhist ideas. 132 pages.

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<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>Encouraging Potentialities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method:</td>
<td>“Seed-Gassho:” Make a fist with right hand, on top of which, place open palm of left hand. Imagine the fist as a seed under the surface of the “ground;” that is, the horizontal left hand; the seed getting ready to break through. Expand use of this “Seed-Gassho” where the “seed” can be any idea or intention.</td>
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<td>Purpose:</td>
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<td>Method:</td>
<td>“Break-Through Gassho:” Follow up on above “Seed-Gassho” by using the fingers of the fist to form a “point” that extends upward between the fingers of the left hand. Use this Gassho to encourage and appreciate the importance of a strong beginning for any new activity or project.</td>
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<td>Purpose:</td>
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<td>Method:</td>
<td>Hold right hand up, with fingers spread widely representing a blossoming flower. Put fingers of left hand around wrist of right hand; this gripping left hand is the supporting “ground” that holds up the flower. Appreciate the satisfaction of the whole “seed to flower” process and apply analogy to any everyday activity.</td>
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