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# O N E N E S S

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Quarterly Newsletter of BRIGHT DAWN: Institute for American Buddhism

Vol. 11 No. 1 Spring 2007

## LEAVE IT BY THE STREAM

by Rev. Koyo Kubose

I want to tell you about an experience I had. My description shows the “what goes around, comes around” nature of our karmic interconnections. My story also offers a teaching that I hope you will find of value.

In the early 70’s during my pre-ministerial life, I was on the psychology faculty at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Most of the faculty were young and we played sports together—a faculty basketball league and touch football on the week ends. Some graduate students also played with us. One particular grad student, A.B., was a good athlete. He also had a very competitive temper. He

was the nicest guy when not competing but while playing, he often got angry at other players and more than once had to be restrained from fighting.

In 1974 I resigned my faculty position to go study Buddhism in Japan. In 1983 I began my ministerial career in Chicago. For the past ten years I’ve been involved with Bright Dawn, the religious educational organization that is carrying on my father’s lifework of Americanizing Buddhism. We sell books, put out this Oneness newsletter, and have a website, among other things. Through the website, people can email us. One day I received an email from A.B. who

had developed an interest in Buddhism. It was like a 32-year time warp had gone by.

A.B. had earned his Ph.D. and was working in New Jersey. We began to correspond and in one of his emails he talked about time and being present centered. He wrote of telling his children when they are rushing around and getting agitated, “If you ever get to then, it’ll still be now.” He said that his kids groan, of course, but that his younger daughter seems to be getting some of it. I mentioned a Mutts cartoon in which Mooch the cat is asked what time it is and answers, “It’s now.” “It’s always now.” Mutts shows his watch which has one arrow pointing to the word NOW and he says “It’s never wrong.” A few months later, A.B. came to Chicago on business and we got together for lunch. He showed me his watch. Inside the watch crystal was some sand and when

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you shook the watch, the sand shifted and the word NOW was revealed. We had a good laugh!

Let me get to the main thing I want to write about in this article. In one email, A.B. wrote, “I’ve been repeating to myself the story about the two monks crossing the stream and the woman one helps. After many basketball games I rehearse, ‘Leave it by the stream’ and this helps shortcut obsessive ideations.” For those of you who don’t know the story being referred to, it goes something like the following account.

A monk and his disciple were traveling through the countryside. They came to a swollen, fast-moving stream. A young lady, dressed in kimono, was standing there—unable to cross. She was quite distressed so the monk offered to help and carried the lady safely across to the other side of the stream. The disciple was shocked at what the monk had done because there was a precept that monks were to have no physical contact with women. The monk and disciple walked a few miles in silence. Then the disciple couldn’t contain himself any longer and blurted, “Master, despite the precept against touching women, you carried that woman across the stream!” The monk replied, “Are you still carrying that woman? I put her down back at the stream.”

A.B. took this story to heart and had condensed the teaching into a personal mantra of “Leave it by the stream.” I could imagine the different kinds of situations where he would say that mantra to himself. I was impressed with his application of a teaching. It is one thing to read about a teaching but quite another thing to apply the teaching in one’s own life. I was influenced by his example. Hearing the story in the context of his life experience made the teaching come alive for me. I decided to start using this teaching of “Leave it by the stream.”

One example of using the phrase was once when I went golfing. No, it had nothing to do with any aspect of my play. Rather it had to do with a rude employee at the golf course. In several of my interactions with this employee, his facial expression and tone of voice were very curt and disapproving. I had not done or said anything to provoke such behavior. I told myself that the problem was with him and not with me. He was having a bad day or suffering from his own personal problems. Yet, no one likes to be treated rudely or unfairly. Many kinds of thoughts kept popping up in my mind. Should I confront the rude person? Say something

witty? Report him to his supervisor? Sometimes it is hard to stop the “obsessive ideations.” It can help to have handy a spiritual tool like the phrase, “Leave it by the stream.”

There are so many situations where it is difficult to “let go.” We may feel we know better but it seems new situations always arise and once again we victimize ourselves. This is why we need many different expressions of the teaching of nonattachment. I have to smile when I realize the amazing way new teachings come my way. It is marvelous how things can come full circle. From a time when a professor and a grad student played sports together, to thirty five years later, when the teacher can be impacted by a student’s current spiritual journey. The Dharma works in mysterious ways!

## SOAP BUDDHA

By Rev. Koyo Kubose

A friend Dave gave us a five-inch tall sitting Buddha made of yellow soap. He told us that his wife Joan had found it while browsing in a store. They were reminded of our “Washing-Hands Gassho” in the last issue of the newsletter, and said that they just had to buy this soap Buddha for us. As you can see, the soap Buddha is sitting serenely on top of our toilet tank. We just can’t bring ourselves to use this soap Buddha for washing our hands. It would probably be a good illustration of Impermanence to use the soap Buddha but instead, we’ve chosen to use the soap Buddha as another kind of teaching. That is, whenever we see it we are reminded of teachings related to various bathroom activities. May this article and accompanying photo nudge our readers to do the Hand-Washing Gassho and maybe even the Toilet Gassho too. Remember, Dharma teachings can be found everywhere!



## Reader Replies

Editor's comment: Let me give some background context about a letter I received. For the past year or so, I have had numerous conversations with S.G. who is quite active with local Buddhist organizations. She calls me regarding various matters; such as, if I could lead a seminar, asking permission to make a DVD from one of my VHS taped Dharma talks, or wanting to get someone's telephone number, etc. Invariably whenever she called, she would also order some books. One of her favorites is our purple booklet *Buddhism: Path of Enlightenment* which she orders in batches of thirty or more to give away free to people at her yoga class or at the temple she attends. Once she ordered 300 copies to give away at her temple's summer festival event. I came to call her the Johnny Appleseed of the Dharma. She replied, "I can't help it; they're such good seeds!" During her most recent telephone call, she asked me for some information, which I was able to provide. She commented that whenever she asked me anything, I always said, "Sure!" She felt that the way I said "sure" was a nice teaching. A few days later, I received the following letter from her:

Dear Sensei, Thank you for the way of your saying "Sure!" Your voice shares a lot of caring and warmth when you

say it. There is much friendship and support. Your "sure" is so immediate and spontaneous and without calculation. "Boom!" 100% - just like you teach. And there is the sense of giving reassurance - like "be sure," have confidence! There is a sense of "be SURE-footed." In these slippery, frigid times (not talking about the weather) this is a welcome reminder to keep going on the path, to trust one's insights and to trust to life's wisdom and light. There is a sense of your being there - SURE - rest as SURED. And of course it rhymes with Pure. So the Pure Land is the SURE Land? Wow! Sensei, that's amazing! Thanks, for SURE. Susan

Editor's comment: I surely had to chuckle when reading her letter. Sharing the Dharma together sure is a joy! I should also mention I was not consciously sure that I had been using the word "sure." I think the word was simply pulled out of me whenever we talked because I surely would like to provide support and encouragement to someone who is walking the Dharma path so nicely as she is. The way she was able to take the word "sure" as a teaching for herself is an example less of my providing a teaching and more of her being so receptive. Whenever there's a great teaching, you can be sure there's also great listening.

## American Buddhist Services

The Heartland Sangha holds 11 A.M. services on the first and third Saturdays of every month at Lake Street Church, 607 Lake Street, Evanston (use courtyard entrance on Chicago Avenue). From November through April, there is optional meditation sitting from 9:30 to 10:30 am before the service.

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 or flowers 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. As a regular speaker, Rev. Koyo Kubose's Dharma Talks are always lively and thought provoking. For more information, call Heartland Sangha President Asayo Horibe at (847) 869-5806.

## Oneness Newsletter Spring 2007

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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.

## LAY PROGRAM APPLICATIONS BEING ACCEPTED

OPEN CALL—Inspired by the vision/mission of the Bright Dawn Institute, supported by our Dharma Circle lay ministry network, and mentored by dedicated Program staff—here is your opportunity to be part of a unique Lay Ministry Program. Applications are now being accepted for the next course of study that will begin this Autumn, 2007. Interested persons should contact us; inquiries may be made by email to: [brightdawn@kubose.com](mailto:brightdawn@kubose.com). You will be sent an Application Package which in addition to an application form, includes an overview of the Lay Program, Plan of Study outline, sample of a past course syllabus, and a list of Lay Program Questions & Answers (some of which are listed below).

Our non-residential or long-distance two-year program is open to persons regardless of where they live. It consists of weekly small group telephone conference calls to discuss assigned readings. Participants need access to long distance telephone service. In addition, since much communication is done via E-mail, internet access is also required. Currently, there are no formal tuition fees. In lieu of financial concerns, the program requires a long-term commitment and a heavy dose of “sweat equity.” For an update on the Lay Program, please see the Lay Program Report in this newsletter issue.

Here are some excerpts from a Question & Answer sheet:

### **What status or title is conferred upon someone who completes your program?**

We are not an accredited seminary. Our status of “Lay Minister” is not equivalent to the ministerial status of someone from a traditional training program. To emphasize this, we use the term induction rather than ordination. We do not encourage our lay ministers to describe themselves using titles such as priest, clergy or reverend. Our lay ministers are not authorized to ordain other persons or to offer confirmation and taking refuge/precept type ceremonies. Such institutional authority is restricted to our Bright Dawn organization.

### **What are Lay Ministers authorized to do and in what ways can they function?**

Lay Ministers can spread the understanding and practice of the Dharma teachings by giving Dharma talks and organizing small Sangha groups. If desired, we can help our Lay Ministers offer such religious services as funerals, memorials, and wedding ceremonies. In line with our

emphasis on lay participation, Lay Ministers can help interested families take active responsibility in jointly carrying out their own religious services. We expect our Lay Ministers to remain connected to our Bright Dawn Institute to both give and receive support regarding our programs. It is important that Lay Ministers maintain involvement in Dharma Circle, our lay minister network.

### **Tell me more about the Dharma Circle network?**

Small lay minister groups maintain communication through regularly scheduled audio-conference calls. These groups or Dharma Circles usually consist of about 4-6 people, and when the group becomes larger, usually it is split into two groups to facilitate individual participation in discussing agreed upon topics, the giving of Dharma Glimpses on a rotating basis, and other small-group activities that lend themselves to the audio-conference format. Dharma Circles are organized on the basis of time zones, common interests, and prior relationships. Larger group audio conferences can be scheduled quarterly or bi-annually to maintain a resource network to keep abreast of what people are doing regionally. Once every two years an actual convention is planned where all lay ministers can meet in person to report on their activities and discuss future planning.

## LAY PROGRAM REPORT

Last Autumn five participants (from Illinois, Wisconsin, Hawaii, and Brazil) began our newly established Lay Ministry Study Program. We started with a 12-week course on Buddhism in America which covered the status of different denominations present in America, plus current topics such as gender issues, engaged Buddhism, interfaith dialogue, etc. The participants wrote reports and discussed them via weekly audio conferences. The texts used were *Buddhism in America* by Richard Seager; and *The Faces of Buddhism in America* edited by Charles Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka.. Several contributing authors of chapters in the book edited by Prebish and Tanaka joined the audio conference sessions as guests to answer questions formulated by our class participants. It was a special treat to have these outstanding scholars share their expertise and enthusiasm with us.

Our curriculum involves a two-year plan of study. In addition to the course on Buddhism in America, other courses (all using the audio conferencing format) will cover topics such as life of the Buddha, basic teachings, and

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Buddhism and Christianity. There is also the opportunity for individual spiritual development/practice, and practicum-type experiences.

One purpose of our Lay Program is to provide an infrastructure of lay ministers to actualize and carry on for future generations the mission of Bright Dawn: Institute for American Buddhism. On the occasion of his temple’s 30th Anniversary in 1974, Rev. Gyomay M. Kubose made what we consider a seminal statement that we have taken as our organization’s founding declaration:

*I have always dreamed of establishing an American Buddhism—different from Indian, Chinese, or Japanese Buddhism—a uniquely American Buddhism that could be easily understood and practiced by Americans and that would contribute to American life and culture. This Buddhism can be explained in simple, everyday language and practiced in every aspect of our daily life. Yet, it is a unique Buddhist life-way, non-dichotomized and non-dualistic, that will bring about a peaceful, meaningful, creative life, both individually and collectively.*

We envision our Lay Program as a way of making this dream come true -- and as it is expressed, “to bring about a peaceful, meaningful, creative life, both individually and collectively.”

The proposed activities for our future lay ministers are outlined by an acronym ADMN:

- A = Ambassador: Being pro-active in promoting to others what the Bright Dawn Institute offers in terms of programs and resources for individual spirituality.
- D = Director: Taking responsibility in the organizing and carrying out of Bright Dawn Institute Programs.
- M = Mentor: Serving as a mentor to those in the Lay Minister Training Program and volunteering active involvement in curriculum matters.
- N = Networking: Participating in Dharma Circle, the Bright Dawn Institute’s Lay Ministry network.

Back in early December of last year, Chicago got its first snowstorm of the season. About ten inches of snow fell. Before using a car parked outside, snow had to be cleared off the windshield and windows. In some cases, snow that the plows pushed against the parked car had to be shoveled out too. Many drivers, exhausted from just getting the bare essential snow off their cars, left snow on the tops of their cars and on their hoods and trunks.

On the day after the snowstorm, the sky was clear and the sun was out. When I was out driving, I saw an unusual and rather funny sight. As I pulled up for a stoplight, a car coming from the opposite direction did the same. However, when the driver stopped his car, the snow on top of his car suddenly slid down and completely covered his windshield. The driver had to get out of his car and scrap the snow off before moving because otherwise he couldn’t see a thing through his windshield. I was totally amused by this and I laughed out loud.

Later, I got to thinking. Is my life like that? Have I accumulated a lot of “snow” over the years and is it piled up without my being aware of it? Have I been clearing away just enough “snow” to function in life? My accumulated karma may catch up with me some day. I should be more aware in each present moment and patiently do a complete job of whatever I am doing. Instead of looking at other people’s “snow,” I’d better clear out MY “snow.”

AI

### **A REINCARNATION JOKE**

(Dedicated to the memory of the late Eddie Toppel who was always calling us to share a joke or two)

Dan and Sam were two old friends who often sat on a park bench talking about life. They wondered if there was an after-life, and agreed that whoever of them went first, would if possible, report back.

Well, Dan passed away and one day Sam was sitting on the park bench when he heard his name. His eyes got big as he said, “Is that you, Dan?” “Yeah Sam, it’s me!” “What’s happening?” Sam eagerly asked. Dan said, “Well, I get fantastic food and all the sex I want. Then I rest, go to sleep, and the next day it’s more of the same.” Sam exclaimed, “Wow, heaven must be a great place!” “Heaven?!” said Dan, “I’m a bull in Montana!”

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| <b>YES YES Your Everyday Spirituality YES YES</b> |  |
| <b>MAR</b>  | <b>Theme:</b> Seasons<br><b>Purpose:</b> To be mindful of nature's cycles<br><b>Method:</b> Spring Gassho: Under an open sky, stretch arms out to each side, welcoming the Spring Equinox; then bring hands together in Gassho. Discover an inner Spring feeling to re-energize your journey of spiritual growth.  |
| <b>APR</b>  | <b>Theme:</b> Flower Blooming<br><b>Purpose:</b> To be inspired by nature's constantly unfolding beauty<br><b>Method:</b> Flower Gassho: Look carefully at a flower and Gassho to it. Keeping palms together, raise arms over head, then spread arms out to sides, mimicking a flower blooming. Vow to live like a flower, blossoming totally in every present moment. |
| <b>MAY</b>  | <b>Theme:</b> Mother<br><b>Purpose:</b> To honor mother-child precious closeness<br><b>Method:</b> Hug Gassho: Hug your mother and Gassho to her; or looking at a photo of your mother, hug yourself and imagine that your arms are her arms, squeezing tightly. Then Gassho to the photo. Dry any tears and smile gently, while nodding your head.                    |

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