



Sangha In Motion

Bimonthly eNewsletter for RK Members in the US

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 6

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2013

Buddhism for Today:
Cultivating the fields of
the heart and mind

HIGHLIGHTS

2013 Gohonzon in
Los Angeles

Lots of news from
the Sanghas!

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New Administration in 2013

From Living the Lotus (Formerly Shan Zai) December 2013

Kosei-kai restarted under a new administration on December 1, 2013. **Rev. Yasutaka Watanabe**, who had strongly supported the activities of our international Dharma mission for the last six years as chair of the Board of Trustees of Rissho Kosei-kai, retired from that position. He was then appointed as consultant to our organization. Rev. Watanabe has been active in promoting various projects, including the legal incorporation of Rissho Kosei-kai in Sri Lanka, building the Dharma center facility in Nepal, establishing Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America, building the facility for Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia (Bangkok), launching a project with the Mongolian government called "Support for Education of Nursing Students in Mongolia," building a Dharma center facility on the Russian island of Sakhalin, and opening Rissho Kosei-kai of Rome. He devotedly worked to establish a firm foundation for our international Dharma mission, which has grown steadily to its present state.

His successor is **Rev. Takeshi Kawabata**, former head of Rissho Kosei-kai's Administration. He served as minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco for five years, and I believe that he will support us in that mission just as ably as Rev. Watanabe has.

Rev. Toshiyuki Kodaka, current minister of the Los Angeles Dharma Center, will return to Japan to become deputy director of the Rissho Kosei-kai Youth Division. His contributions to the development of the Los Angeles center's mission will be remembered for many years; his efforts have become part of the history of the center, as well as of Rissho Kosei-kai's international Dharma mission. **Rev. Takashi Yoshizawa**, currently the director of Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (RKINA), will succeed Rev. Kodaka as minister of the Los Angeles Dharma Center while remaining director of RKINA. He has supported the US mission with great breadth of vision. The RKINA office will move to Los Angeles, so he can facilitate these two positions at the same time.

Lastly, **Rev. Yukimasa Hagiwara**, who had served for a decade as deputy director of Rissho Kosei-kai International since December 2003, has been appointed minister of the Koga Dharma Center in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan. He has devoted himself to the administrative and educational affairs of all our branches throughout the world, and also promoted translation and publication work. He has also promoted our Dharma mission in Sakhalin, Ulaanbaatar, Hong Kong, Sydney, and Shanghai. The outstanding development of our international Dharma mission in recent years is largely due to his efforts. His duties will be taken over by Rev. Naoki Taketani, who had been working in the External Affairs Department of Rissho Kosei-kai. Rev. Taketani has extensive experience with international interfaith dialogue and cooperation through study in the United Kingdom, and his role as representative of Rissho Kosei-kai at its Geneva office for several years.

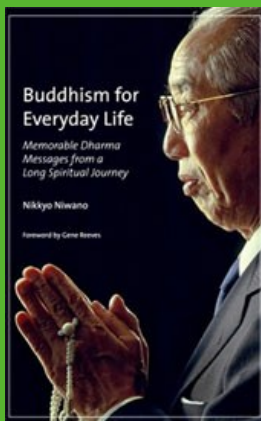
Rissho Kosei-kai International will walk together with all of you to develop each branch around the world. I do hope for your continuous cooperation with us in our efforts. - Rev. Watanabe

Other US Administrative Changes

Rev. Nick Ozuna will be moving to RKINA in the spring to assume the duties of an assisting minister and Dharma Instructor to the smaller Dharma Centers in the US. He will be traveling to visit the centers in person.



Excerpt from
Debts of Gratitude



Guidance from Founder Niwano

"Certainly we are all aware of our superficial relationships with our family, neighbors, coworkers, and bosses. But we tend to see only each individual, remaining unaware of how closely we all are actually bound together. We are bound not only to those people and things most intimate with us but also, by invisible threads, to people and things that seem to have absolutely nothing to do with us. These threads crisscross in a complicated web of cause

and effect, a web of existence that is constantly changing and that is the final confirmation of all existence.

Once we acknowledge that our lives are intimately related to innumerable other existences, it becomes impossible to insist that we can live on our own. We may have thought we were living under our own power, but now we see that we are supported by others. We realize there is no such thing as an independent self."

Commentary by Mary Sigman

On October 6, 2013 I was fortunate to be part of a wonderful group of RK members that were receiving their Gohonzon at LA Church. In preparation for this event we were all asked to compose a short vow for the occasion. What I, and I believe most of us did not know, was that we would be reading these vows aloud on the day prior to the ceremony.

Hearing all of the heartfelt and very different presentations, one could not fail to be impressed with the outpouring of gratitude from each member. As I was writing my Vow before flying to LA, I remember how deeply I felt the influence of those that had brought me to that moment. The more I reflected I began to see what Founder called the "invisible threads" and how they truly have crisscrossed all over the world to

bring me to that weekend at LA Church. I knew I would not be there without them.

And then as the weekend progressed, I saw that chain of invisible threads becoming quite visible. I saw all the busy hands at the church that cooked our meals, that prepared our sleeping quarters, that made sure we got to the airport on time. I saw all the preparation from RKINA to organize the weekend, the work from all the Reverends, the personal care in transporting our Gohonzons to the US. And I saw all of the wonderful fellow members that shared this weekend together realizing that Buddha's skillful means had brought us all together for that moment. May I take this opportunity to thank the Buddha, Risho Kosei-kai, LA Church, and RKINA on behalf of our Gohonzon group. We are all deeply, profoundly grateful.

RKINA

On Sunday, October 6th 2013 at Rissho Kosei-kai Los Angeles, a solemn Gohonzon Presentation Ceremony was held. There were 26 recipients from all over the United States. The ceremony proceeded in the traditional manner and the members participated with great joy. Gohonzon is the term to denote an object of devotion in many forms of Japanese Buddhism. In the Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist tradition, the Gohonzon is a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha and a scroll inscribed in ink with traditional kanji characters and two medieval-Sanskrit scripts intended to express inner enlightenment. The phrase Nam Myoho Renge Kyo — the primary Mantra — is written down the center.

Recipients

RKINA Church

Orange County: Frederick Fox, Robert Schmidt

Ft Myers: Mary Tracy Sigman

Tampa Bay: Frank Mavro

San Francisco Church

Seattle: Hiroko Kuyper, Rika Logue, Masako Berthold, Kevin Ikari

San Francisco: Akiko Kinoshita

Los Angeles Church

Los Angeles: Sonoko Asato, Taeko Kawasaki, Yasuyo Bacey, Shigeko Thrower, Betty Lininger

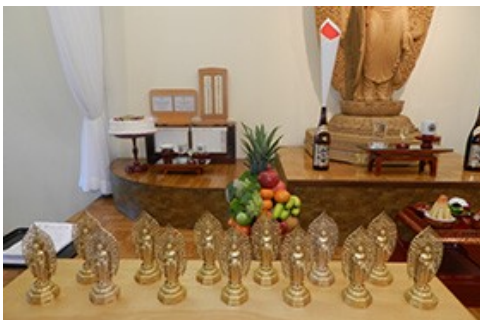
San Antonio: Donald Garrahan, Mariano Velez

Oklahoma City Church

OKC: Karen Peterson, Roger Williams, Kathy Spengler, Randy Shumate, Andrew Bentley, Monica Buck, Karen Dunn

Dayton: Carrie Groesser

Portland: Brenna King





In Gratitude

Oklahoma City

by Rev. Kris Ladusau

A young man went to apply for a managerial position in a big company. He passed the initial interview, and now would meet the director for the final interview. The director discovered from his CV that the youth's academic achievements were excellent. He asked, "Did you obtain any scholarships in school?" the youth answered "no." "Was it your father who paid for your school fees?" The young man replied, "No, my father passed away when I was a year old, so it was my mother who worked and paid for my school." "Where did she work?" The young man said, "She worked as a clothes cleaner." The director requested the youth to show his hands. They were smooth and perfect. "Have you ever helped your mother wash clothes?" He replied, "Never. She always wanted me to study and read more books. Besides, my mother can wash clothes faster than me." The director said, "I have a request. When you go home today, go and clean your mother's hands, and then see me tomorrow morning.

The youth felt that his chance of landing the job was high. When he went back home, he asked his mother to let him clean her hands. His mother thought it was an odd request, but she agreed and showed her hands to her son. He began to clean his mother's hands slowly and he began to cry. It was the first time he noticed that his mother's hands were so wrinkled and damaged with many bruises. Some bruises were so painful that his mother winced when he touched them.

This was the first time he realized that it was this pair of hands that washed the clothes everyday to enable him to pay for college. These hands were the price she paid for his education, his school activities and his future.

After cleaning his mother hands, the youth quietly washed all the remaining clothes for his mother. That night, mother and son talked for a very long time. The next morning, he went to the director's office. The Director noticed the tears in the young man's eyes and he asked, "Can you tell me what you learned yesterday?" He answered, "I cleaned my mother's hands, and also finished cleaning all the remaining clothes."

"I know now what appreciation is. Without my mother, I would not be who I am today. By helping my mother, only now do I realize how difficult and tough it is to get something done on your own. And I have come to appreciate the importance and value of helping each other." The director said, "This is what I am looking for in a manager. I want to hire a person who can appreciate the help of others, a person who knows the sufferings of others in getting things done, and who would not put money as their only focus in life. You are hired." This young person worked very hard, and received the respect of his subordinates. Every employee worked diligently and worked as a team. The company's performance improved tremendously.

Oklahoma City

by Rev. Kris Ladusau



Rev. Kris Ladusau recently performed a baby blessing at the Oklahoma Dharma Center. Several members have requested having a ceremony. Rev. Ladusau created a Buddhist service for the children to be blessed at the Dharma Center. This is the third ceremony that has been performed. It is a joyful opportunity for the sangha to join in support of these new lives and the families that have brought them into this world.

WATER MATTERS *Interfaith Prayer for Rain*

September 18th was an Interfaith Day of Prayer for Rain. Oklahoma has been in need of rain for the farmers to grow crops. This event was held at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral. The focus was also on stewardship and caring for our water resources. Nine faith traditions were represented at the Prayer Service. *(Interestingly, it rained the day after the prayer service)*

Clay Pope of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts also provided an update of the drought situation in Oklahoma. Oklahoma Council of Churches will continue its environmental con-





Interfaith Activities

Oklahoma City

by Rev. Kris Ladusau

Oklahoma is very active with interfaith.

- We are board members on the Interfaith Alliance of Oklahoma.
- Board members of Oklahoma Council of Churches - Religions United.
- We participate in activities at the Turkish Islamic Cultural Center.
- We have an ongoing relationship with the Jewish Synagogue.
- We were invited to the grand opening of the new Sikh Temple.

Most recently we participated in Oklahoma's first ever Interfaith Work Day. One hundred people from ten religions came together to work at the battered women's shelter.

We cleaned, painted, planted flowers, put together picnic tables and trimmed bushes and trees. We shared a meal together after we finished. Everyone had a wonderful time. This project came to life from reading Eboo Patel's book "Acts of Faith". He promotes moving beyond interfaith dialogue into acts of compassion accomplished together for the benefit of the community. Many people commented on how they were so happy to work together and really get to know people from other faith traditions.

One member said that she was surprised that we all seemed the same - we want to be happy, we want our children to have a good life and we all have kindness and compassion to share with each other.

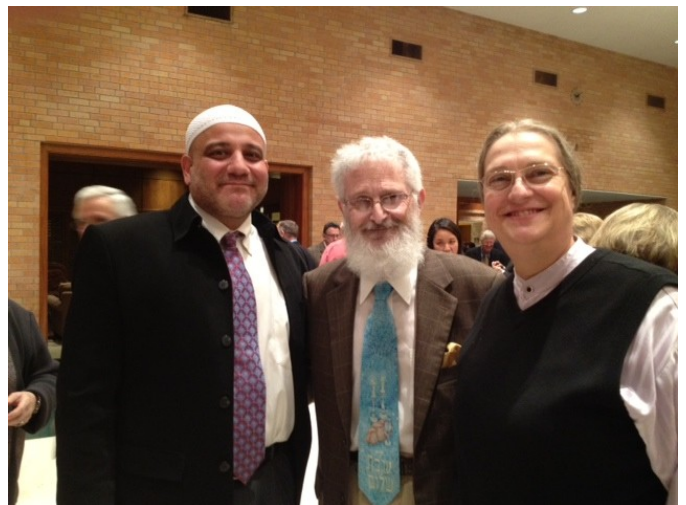


Oklahoma City

by Rev. Kris Ladusau



Interfaith group working on projects at the OKC Battered Women's Shelter





The Importance of Half-closed Eyes

Hawaii

by Brad Tom

At work I was turned down for a promotion that I thought I deserved more than anyone else in the division. There was a position open for a division trainer in our sales office. Since the primary focus of this position would be to train salespeople and account managers how to do their job properly, I felt that I was more qualified and had more skill to get that job. I am the only person in the division who held both jobs and know how the company does business backwards and forwards. I felt I knew the technical aspects and systems at least as well as any other person in the company. I had been doing this after all for 13 years.

When I didn't get the job, I of course, congratulated the other person because he was deserving of getting the position. Although greatly disappointed, I continued on with my job and helped in any way I was asked. I guess I didn't what to admit it to myself but the disappointment at not getting the position affected my performance more than I would have liked.

Since we hired 2 new people and have no real manager for my unit of 5 people, I took it upon myself to train and supervise the team. This took away a considerable amount of time away from my own job and brought my performance down. Having all the 4 people constantly asking me questions through out the day caused me to miss my bonus for the quarter.

I felt that I deserved that position or that the company needed to compensate me for all the hard work that I put in. I felt that supervising my unit would count for something and earn me some company bonus points. What I didn't realize is that I had been compensated for all my work because I get a paycheck twice a week. So although I was not formally recognized for all my efforts, by being promoted, I still get paid to do my job and I need to refocus on that now.

President Nichiko Niwano described in an article, the image of Buddha with eyes that are half opened and half shut. These images of Buddha depicting eyes that are half shut are known as "half-closed eyes". Buddha is teaching us the importance of seeing the outside world with half of our eyes and our own inner world with the other half. In other words, seeing our own inner world with our eyes half-closed is to become aware of the conceit that can be called the original source of our mental sufferings, while seeing the world outside this way is to recognize our large debt of gratitude by awakening to the fact that we are caused to live surrounded by unlimited blessings.

Our eyes are rather good at seeing the outside world. However, when our attention goes only to the outside world we neglect viewing our inner world and we gradually become puffed up with a self-centered way of thinking that destroys the harmony of our surroundings. As a result, a rife can develop in our human relations and we will feel discontented.

Being able to look at the situation through what President Niwano described as "half closed eyes" I can now see that my pride, or conceit got in the way of my feeling of gratitude for doing the job that I have and getting paid for it. Because I can let go of the unjust feeling I had with the situation, I am no longer bothered by it and can be more productive at work.

So I ask each one of you, with the upcoming holidays, you will be stretched thin and try to do a lot in very little time. You may feel your family is ungrateful for the hard work it took to create a wonderful Thanksgiving meal or that your boss doesn't give you an extra hour off for the holidays. Take a look inside yourself and don't let that feeling of conceit dampen the joy that each day brings. I challenge all of you to look at the inner self when negative feelings arise and objectively change your perception of things. Only then, will you be able to grasp the feeling of gratitude that Buddha wants you to feel with your interactions.



Rev. Hosoyama came back for a visit and brought members of his new church in Japan for us to meet.



Ft. Myers

by Mary Sigman



New Altar's In Ft. Myers

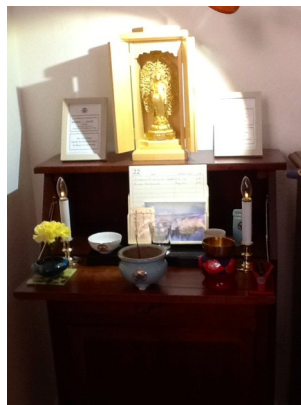


Jerry and Judith Freeman and their new home altar

As practicing Lay Buddhists and students of the Dharma, we find that having an altar at home makes our daily devotion much more practical and meaningful. Our gratitude for the opportunity to establish and enshrine our home altar goes far. We are forever grateful to Reverend Nick from the Tampa/Clearwater Sangha, and his wife Chika, for their efforts in traveling here and taking their time for this special occasion. We also hold much gratitude to our leader, Mary Sigman for her tireless and unselfish efforts at everything she does. Also, we are grateful to be very close friends to all members of the Rissho Kosei Kai, Fort Meyers Dharma Center; as all have become an essential part of our devotion and education. - The Freeman's



Jen Yontz Orlando and Nick Orlando



Mary Sigman's New Home Altar



Pride Celebration in Ft, Myers attended by several of the members.



San Antonio

by Kevin Roche

This are some of our new members this season. From left (standing): Daisy Ross, Karen George, Liam Sherwood, Tony Hall, Dwayne Curtis, June Wright, Seated in front is Rev. Masutoshi Kohno and Kate Beavers.



Kevin Roche and Sami Saenz from RK SA at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo to receive Dharma Teacher in October.

Reverends Takashi Kodaka and Masutoshi Kohno at their farewell ceremony in San Antonio Dharma Center. Both Reverends have been reassigned to Tokyo for the New Year



New York

by Robert Penne



All Living Beings Have Buddha Nature

Following the death of my family's pet dog in June of this year, I wrote the following article which I would like to share with the readers of Sangha in Motion.

All Living Beings Have Buddha-Nature

Last month a member of my family past away after suffering a stroke. Her name was Nevada and she happened to be a dog. With her death I began to think about what Buddhism has to say about animals and their potential for enlightenment.

Following his enlightenment under a bo tree, Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have exclaimed, "Wonderful! Wonderful! All living beings possess the wisdom and virtuous sign of the Tathagata, but they do not realize this because of their attachment to desire and illusions."

The term "Tathagata" is a Pali word meaning, "one who has thus come" and is a term for the Buddha and Buddhahood.

Shakyamuni Buddha says, "All living beings possess the wisdom and virtuous sign of the Tathagata..." I find this interesting in that he did not say "all people" or "all humans" but said, 'All living beings...' which includes animals and plants

In the Manifestation Chapter of the Flower Adornment Sutra it says, "There is not a single living being who is not replete with wisdom of the Thus Come One."

We humans tend to think of ourselves as superior to other animals and certainly plants. Many may find Buddhism's declaration that all living beings have Buddha-nature to be a humorous assertion. But these feelings of superiority are not based on fact, but ego.

When the Buddha awakened to the truths of the universe he saw that everything can be a buddha. Everything can overcome attachment and free themselves of illusions and build a life of happiness and peace of mind.

Human beings can create culture, technology and literature, but all animals have the same basic emotions (and let's not forget that many primates also have basic culture and technology too).

Mother animals care for their young. Elephants mourn the loss of family members. Gorillas have close knit family units. Lions teach their young to hunt. Even plants have basic intelligence. Plants are the basic food for most of the world, they sustain life. They don't need us to live, but we need them and they provide - sounds like a Buddha to me!

At the core, all living beings are the same.

Nevada was part of my family for nearly ten years and each day she brought joy into our household.

She had no attachments. No need for possessions.

She loved others.

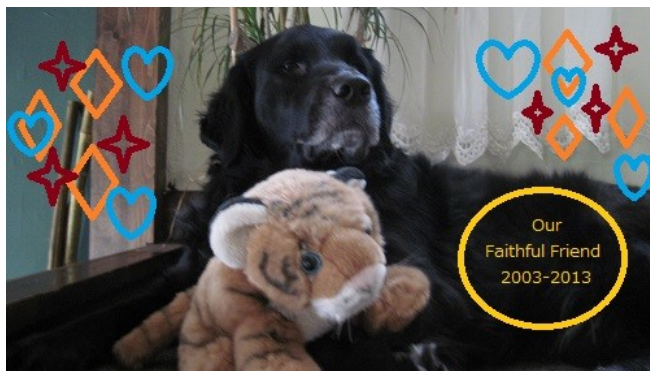
She taught me patience, compassion and unconditional love. I learned more from her than she learned from me.

She had Buddha-nature.

Nevada was a Buddha.

And so are you. So am I.

We all are, we only need to awaken to this fact.



Yoko, Michi and Noriko at Michi's house



Thanks-giving by Marilyn Crabil

This article was written before Thanksgiving.

Thanks-giving

Thanksgiving Day is almost upon us. It's a time set aside to reflect on the things that we are grateful for in our lives. For some families it is tradition for each person seated at the table to say out loud what he or she is thankful for. It is almost a "given" that four things will be mentioned: family, friends, job and health.

Each of these things is certainly vital to our feeling of contentment or well-being if they are positive influences: an understanding family; supportive friends, satisfying job; and good health. For those of us who are blessed with these positive buoys that sustain us through rough patches in our journey through life, these things come easily to mind and are rattled off almost without conscious thought.

I know one fellow who is thankful that he has a job - any job – and that is his stock answer every year, without fail. In fact, he is so consistent in his response that the whole family says "his job" in unison when it's Bob's turn to speak! It can take less than a single minute for everyone present to say something, then the "obligation" is fulfilled and the turkey can be carved.

One of the most uplifting experiences I've been blessed to have was when I was a guest at a friend's home for Thanksgiving where, although the tradition was the same, the response was quite different.

When the family and guests were called to gather for dinner, there was no food on the table. Each person stood at their chosen position where they would soon be seated around the dining table. Then, one by one, they gave heartfelt thanks for something or someone that had touched their lives that year

My friend's sister was recovering from a battle with breast cancer, and she was wan and frail. She was thankful to be able to celebrate that Thanksgiving Day with her family ...and although she would not wish cancer on anyone, she was grateful for the positive ways cancer had affected her life!

She took a moment to mention family members who had walked with her through her ordeal. She singled out friends with whom she had grown

Thanks-giving

closer as a result of their support. She mentioned neighbors who brought in meals for her family and took care of her kids while she was too weak to move. She named medical personnel who spent time with her as she sat through hours of chemo. She was grateful for new technology and techniques that reduced the ravaging effects of the disease on her body. She was grateful for a new perspective on life and a shift in her priorities.

That year had been a tough one -- her diagnosis was devastating, her road back to health had been arduous, and her prognosis was still indefinite – yet she was full of gratitude!

Twenty minutes flew by while each person took a moment to express for whom or for what they were grateful that year, and more importantly, *why* they were grateful. Cheers went up, tears were shed, a couple of “high fives” were offered – this was truly a celebration of thanks. By the time everyone had spoken, the energy in that room was off the charts! Every person there had been uplifted and energized with the spirit of thanks-giving. It was exhilarating! Then the turkey and trimmings were brought to the table and a true feast of thanksgiving began

For me, that Thanksgiving Day was like no other, and I carried it’s after-glow with me for months. How fortunate I was to be reminded at a very young age that while it is easy to be grateful for all of the good things that come to us, we can be equally grateful for all the adversity that presents itself, because beyond all doubt, our challenges and problems are always accompanied by great gifts.

Thanksgiving Day is just around the corner. What better time to recognize those people and things for which we are truly grateful and to acknowledge them with sincere thanks. Feel the warmth, feel the energy – you may be moved, as I was, to make every day a thanks-giving day.



Emoto’s Water Crystal for “Thank You”

Gratitude

by Jan Rose OKC



Giving thanks is pretty easy this time of year. It is on all our minds during the holidays. However, gratitude, if limited at Thanksgiving is like limiting your spiritual practice to just going to church and doing spiritual things on Sunday, or similarly, limiting your generosity and donation to the Christmas season, or even sitting in meditation for peace and tranquility but never spreading that peace and tranquility beyond the cushion. None of these has the impact of transforming your heart and mind. In order for change to happen, gratitude, generosity, donation, peace and tranquility must be given daily.

An attitude or perspective (let's call it right view) of "gratitude is like looking into the light, and at the light rather than trying to peer into darkness." (This quote comes from "A Christian's Appreciation of Buddhism" by Rev. Reid)

This "gratitude attitude" requires you to train your focus to see another dimension of that which is going on at all times and all around you. I say this because it is coming from someone (namely me) who lived a life like Eeyore while surrounded by the Tao of Pooh.

This is not to shame or humiliate the Eeyores among or within us, it is to say that the negative view, which may be conditioned, habituated or even be an aspect of our personal natures can be retrained to see the beauty in every moment. It is a matter of training the focus of attention, usually outward away from our ego-injuries.

So, the practice is to be grateful to everyone and everything that comes our way. Be grateful especially to the people who irritate, since they reveal where we can still be irritated, they show us where there is work still to be done. The people who push up against our sore spots, our triggers, where we might have thought we were free, fine and A-OK, but now discover we conceal grudges, and attachments, and ego pride, and jealousy and conditioned clinging and all the rest of the stuff buried "safely" away in the stored consciousness.

The practice of gratitude is one of the ways of loosening our attachments to our concept of a solid, unchanging self...our clinging to antiquated beliefs about self. Our attachments are difficult to loosen but **impossible** without awareness. So doesn't it make beautiful sense to welcome and be grateful for awareness coming from everyone and everything that comes our way? As Founder Niwano said, "Enlightenment is in the encounter." So, go forth and encounter with Gratitude!

Jan Rose – Thanksgiving 2013

Developing
an Attitude
for
Gratitude

Offering Gratitude

by Marilyn Crabil (Dayton)

The ability to feel grateful is one of the biggest gifts we have been given. Sadly, it seems that it is a gift that is largely overlooked, or at least under used. How many of us let days or weeks go by without recognizing or acknowledging that we are grateful that some person, thing or event has touched our life?

Many years ago I was challenged to write down five things that I was grateful for that day ...and part of that challenge was not to fall back on the often-mentioned "home, family, friends, job and health" unless something really stood out about one of those things that day.

So, I set out to be aware of the things that lightened and brightened my day. In the morning, I took a few minutes to express my gratitude for the simple things in my life. In the evening, I said out loud five things that happened that day for which I was grateful. This simple exercise allowed me to see and value the things that made my day more pleasant. Some days I had to be creative to find five things; other days I could list ten or twenty! Soon this exercise became a habit. This practice of being thankful every day deepened my appreciation for life and changed my outlook. I found that developing a thankful attitude goes a long way toward developing a more resilient and appreciative self. One can find things to be genuinely grateful for even in the most difficult of times.

Here are some of the things I've learned about offering gratitude:

Being grateful is a choice. Make the choice to be the calm and seek a peaceful, quiet spot and be thankful. Make that choice every day.

Offering gratitude out loud or written on paper enhances the experience. For one entire year, I wrote down my gratitude's in a journal, and often referred back to that expanding history of thankfulness for support.

Making it a habit changes your life. Regularly offering gratitude's changes one's outlook on life, and instills an attitude that smoothes the way through tough times

When receiving a gift, it's important to think about the whole process. Focus on how much time, effort, and thought went into the gift. Taking the time to realize how much work and caring a person has willingly given deepens your appreciation for both the giver and the gift.

Realize each day is a gift. There are so many things that we take for granted, but perhaps the biggest is time itself. Each day -- indeed each moment we have -- is a precious gift. Be cautious not to be wasteful or unappreciative of these moments, for they will not come again.

Genuine gratitude does not have an expectation attached. When we quit expecting the world (or people) to give us things, we become more focused on enjoying the gifts that do come our way.

Be grateful for the adversity that presents itself. It's easy to be grateful for the good things that come to us, but we should be equally grateful for the adversity. Beyond doubt, our challenges and problems are always accompanied by great gifts. Often, the greater the challenge, the greater the gift!

Gratitude is the attractor of abundance in all its forms. By receiving and being genuinely grateful for the smallest gift that comes our way, we invite more gifts into our lives.

When we offer heartfelt gratitude, we expend energy. The Universe replaces that energy, reflecting it back to us in the form of abundance. The Universe delivers what we really need and want, not what media or society dictates we should want!

Be aware of the direct relationship between our gratitude and our power to create. When we acknowledge the manifestation of our intentions by expressing our gratitude, we are actually completing the last step in a cycle that started long ago -- a cycle that began with a desire to create something for ourselves, as a yearning to experience something new, or as a call to become something more.

Recently, I was nudged to offer 100 gratitude's in a single day. Initially I thought that would be a difficult task, but as I looked for things that made me smile or made my day pleasant, the number was easily reached, to my surprise. In the process, I found that my attention was focused, and as I recognized things for which to be grateful, I realized just how many small things I had previously taken for granted. With this new perspective, my mindset shifted, and my approach to the day adjusted. There was no opportunity to stress, because every negative had a positive for which I was thankful. Neither was there an opportunity to suffer because my mind was full of gratitude and my heart was full of love, and I was at peace.

I now understand that secreted within the sweet feeling of gratitude lies the forward motion of our evolution and the revealing of who we really are.



WCRP

by Rev. Shoko Mizutani

A Religion Which Is a Blessing for All Humanity

Before joining Kosei-kai as a staff member, I took part in rice breeding work in Hokkaido, in the northernmost part of Japan. Rice originated in tropical Asia, but after ages of growth and development, there came to be many types of grains which could be produced in colder climates. Rice did not transform into wheat to do this. Continuing to be rice, it adapted to the severe environment through manifesting its potential ability. The rice crop survived in the different climate, and has been benefiting people ever since.

Religions are now facing new challenges. People in the world are already well aware that peace will never be built by simply excluding people with different ideas and thoughts; on the contrary, peace is only possible through embracing others. An exclusive attitude brings about conflict with others, and people will eventually abandon such narrow perspectives.

The 9th World Assembly of Religions for Peace was held in Vienna last month, with the theme of “Welcoming the other.” When a religion dedicates all its strength toward the goal of meeting the expectations of all people in the world, and manifests its innate potential to accept and also welcome the other, that religion will continue to be a blessing for all humanity.

Family Matters

Best Friends

Before the time of this story, people in Asia used to say that there would never be a time when an elephant and a dog would be friends. Elephants simply did not like dogs, and dogs were afraid of elephants.

When dogs are frightened by those who are bigger than they are, they often bark very loudly, to cover up their fear. When dogs used to do this when they saw elephants, the elephants would get annoyed and chase them. Elephants had no patience at all when it came to dogs. Even if a dog were quiet and still, any nearby elephant would automatically attack him. This is why everybody agreed that elephant and dogs were “natural enemies,” just like lions and tigers, or cats and mice.

One upon a time, there was a royal bull elephant, who was very well fed and cared for. In the neighborhood of the elephant shed, there was a scrawny, poorly fed, stray dog. He was attracted by the smell of the rich sweet rice being fed to the royal elephant. So he began sneaking into the shed and eating the wonderful rice that fell from the elephant’s mouth. He liked it so much, that soon he would eat nowhere else. While enjoying his food, the big mighty elephant did not notice the tiny, shy, stray dog.

By eating such rich food, the once underfed dog gradually got bigger and stronger, and became very handsome looking. The good-natured elephant began to notice him. Since the dog had gotten used to being around the elephant, he lost his fear so he did not bark at him. Because he was not annoyed by the friendly dog, the elephant gradually got used to him.

Slowly they became friendlier and friendlier with each other. Before long, neither would eat without the other, and they enjoyed spending their time together. When they played, the dog would grab the elephant’s heavy trunk, and the elephant would swing him forward and backward, from side to side, up and down, and even in circles! So it was that they became “best friends,” and wanted never to be separated.

Then one day a man from a remote village, who was visiting the city, passed by the elephant shed. He saw the frisky dog, who had become strong and beautiful. He bought him from the mahout, even though he didn’t really own him. He took him back to his home village, without anyone knowing where that was.

Of course, the royal bull elephant became very sad, since he missed his best friend, the dog. He became so sad that he didn’t want to do anything, not even eat or drink or bathe. So the mahout had to report this to the king, although he said nothing about selling the friendly dog.

It just so happened that the king had an intelligent minister who was known for his understanding of animals. So he told him to go and find out the reason for the elephant’s condition.

The wise minister went to the elephant shed. He saw at once that the royal bull elephant was very sad. He thought, “This once happy elephant does not appear to be sick in any way. But I have seen this condition before, in men and animals alike. This elephant is grief-stricken, probably due to the loss of a very dear friend.”

Then he said to the guards and attendants, “I find no sickness. He seems to be grief-stricken due to the loss of a friend. Do you know if this elephant had a very close friendship with anyone?”

They told him how the royal elephant and the stray dog were best friends. “What happened to this stray dog?” asked the minister. He was taken by an unknown man,” they replied, “and we do not know where he is now.”

The minister returned to the king and said, “Your majesty, I am happy to say your elephant is not sick. As strange as it may sound, he became best friends with a stray dog! Since the dog has been taken away, the elephant is grief-stricken and does not feel like eating, drinking, or bathing. This is my opinion.”

The king said, “Friendship is one of life’s most wonderful things. My minister, how can we bring back my elephant’s friend and make him happy again?”

“My lord,” replied the minister, “I suggest you make an official announcement, that whoever has the dog who used to live at the royal elephant shed, will be fined.”

This was done, and when the villager heard of it, he released the dog from his house. The dog was filled with great happiness and ran as fast as he could, straight back to his best friend, the royal bull elephant.

The elephant was so overjoyed, that he picked up his friend with his trunk and sat him on top of his head. The happy dog wagged his tail, while the elephant’s eyes sparkled with delight. The both lived happily ever after.

Meanwhile, the king was very pleased by his elephant’s full recovery. He was amazed that his minister seemed to be able to read the mind of an elephant, so he rewarded him appropriately.

THE MORAL IS: Even “natural enemies” can become “best friends.”



Art from the Sanghas by Rose Cirigliano

NYC Artist Joeallen Gibson

Rose: When did you decide you wanted to be an artist?

Joeallen: I had always wanted to be an artist and as I started healing and getting my feet under me, I realized that my disability was actually a chance at a new life. I started painting, I had drawn, been a photographer and a potter throughout my career, but just as time allowed. Now was my big chance to do what I had always wanted to do. The kids are through college and I don't require much money to live. So I threw my self into art with abandon. But still there was something missing: friends and faith.



Since I was recovering from a seizure disorder I was not allowed to drive. However, with no friends and a mother in her 80's, I needed a way to get to the store and such, so I got a scooter with a sidecar at the local scooter shop. I figured if I had a seizure while driving the scooter the only person I would damage was myself, certainly I wouldn't kill anyone in a car and very few people walk anywhere in OKC, it's a very large sprawling city. The owner of the shop, Steve Hudson is a member of the Dharma Center. As time went on and we became friends and one discussion lead to another he said you sound like a Buddhist and he invited me to a service in 2010. It was like universe pulled me into his shop.

I started attending the Dharma Center and attended the basic class. Then Lotus Sutra class and no teachings had ever made more of an impact on my life. I started a daily practice and life has improved, not a straight line by any means, but I'm practicing and am convinced that I've found a home complete not with just friends but family. I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to take over the prison outreach for the center. Randy Shumate and I are active at the Oklahoma State Reformatory teaching basic Buddhism and meditation.

Gassho,
Joeallen

NYC Artist Joeallen Gibson

Detail of "Nautalistoid"



The painting "Nautalistoid" that I've been working on for longer than I care to admit, is finally finished. I wanted to share it with you. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did creating it.

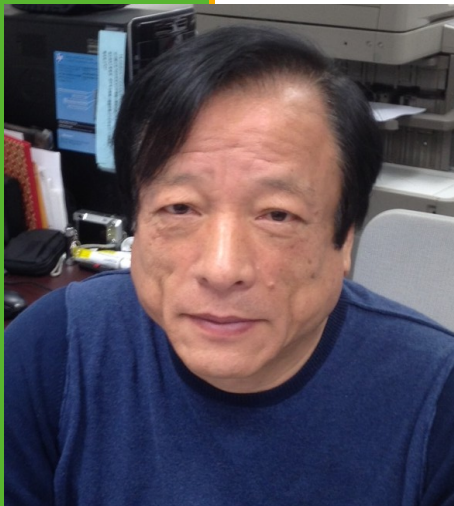
Best Wishes to All,

Joeallen Gibson
Geologic Colors Studio
Okla. City, OK
www.geoism-art.com

Art from the Sanghas by Rose Cirigliano

NY Artist Masayoshi Imura

New ikebana arrangement by Yoshi Imura that is now gracing the hallway in the NY church.



Poetry by Kathy Austin - Dayton



Poetry Corner

Turn to Winter

This is a season of goodbyes.
To warmth —
Even the books I touch
in the cold attic library
make me shiver;

To the light that brought
pastels of spring,
rainbows of summer,
embers of fall;

To the birdsong
and birds' bright blues
and reds.
To the twine and curl
of leaves
and reach toward shining.
Their departure left the landscape
monochrome, linear;

To the croaks and chirps,
the hum and buzz,
the busy crawling toward,
now ended.

Everything obeys the season's order —
streams slow down,
freeze,
leave only cracked ice
to write their stories.

Everything inside is pared down
behind the glass,
neatly placed —
the lip balm, lotion,
a cup of tea,
quilts folded
and folded again, ready for use,
slippers on the rug
as we practice in the darkness
our final goodbye.

Solstice

The winter sun
clings without contention
to the horizon.
Summer birds have long gone south,
taking their bright songs with them.

Even the starlings' squabbles and chatter
are missing today.
Shadows lengthen, hide
a weakened sun
as it heads for solstice.

A Christmas carol hums loosely
in your head as you
make your way along a wooded path
devoid of any agitating color,
going nowhere in particular.

With each slow step, you accept
the silent peace of today's departing light
in gratitude,
in deepest gratitude.

Haiku by Kevin Roche SA

"In this world
We walk on the roof of hell,
gazing at flowers"

-Kobayashi Issa

"First winter rain-
even the monkey
seems to want a raincoat."

-Matsuo Basho

Health Living by Kevin Roche



Mindful Eating

Today, in the Western world, (and increasingly – the Eastern world), eating habits have become a source of suffering for many people. Throughout history, the *lack* of food and limited food choices defined issue. Increasingly, in many cultures today, food *abundance* and *unlimited* food options have overtaken starvation as the leading cause of malnutrition. As Buddhists, perhaps our contribution to this issue lies in our understanding of the practice of “mindfulness.”

First, let’s make one thing clear: mindful eating is NOT a diet! Mindful eating is simply a method for paying closer attention to our eating behaviors, and then - eating with intention. Through mindfulness practice, perhaps we can help create positive eating behaviors and possibly develop a compassionate attitude toward our own struggles.

Before we eat :

Let’s begin with 6 words : who, what, when , where, why, and how

WHO– Who do you eat with? Do they cause you stress? Do you eat more when you eat alone or with people? Are you the food preparer? Do you think people judge what you eat? Be mindful.

WHAT- What do you eat? What foods do you like? Are you a protein eater, a vegetarian, a carb-aholic? Do you drink alcohol with meals? Do you eat mostly fast-foods? Be mindful.

WHEN - Do you eat late at night? Do you snack all day? Are you a breakfast – skipper? Be mindful.

WHERE - Where do you eat? Do you eat on the run? Do you eat in the car? Do you eat while watching TV? Be mindful.

WHY – Do you eat because you are hungry or because it is time to eat? Do you eat when you are bored? Tired? Stressed? Be mindful.

HOW- Do you eat slowly? Do you eat rapidly? Do you drink fluids when you eat? Are they sugar drinks? Are they alcoholic drinks? Do you eat one food at a time, or all the foods together Do you make sure you “save room” for dessert?

The Food



Mindful Eating (continued)

A mindful eater might ask:

Where did this food come from? Was it grown? Was it raised? Was it made from a variety of ingredients? Who were the people that made, grew, or raised this food for me? What type of life might they lead? How hard do they work to provide this nourishment for others? Try to imagine what it is like to lead the life of that food provider. Appreciate that you *have food*, when many do not.

Imagine the many sacrifices made by people /plants/ and animals to make this meal available.

Use your senses

How does the food look? What are the smells you notice? What flavors can you discern? What is the temperature and texture of the food? Is the experience pleasurable?

Slow this process down. Appreciate your senses. Bring your attention to what you are doing at each moment

Helpful Tips to remain mindful when eating

- Concentrate on your meal.
- Do nothing else when eating (no driving, NO Electronic gadgets).
- Sip water between bites.
- Put your fork down between bites.
- Eat with your non-dominant hand.
- Chew each bite slowly and completely.
- Eat only until you are no longer hungry (you do NOT have to finish every meal).
- Add fiber to meals (this increases your sense of fullness and reduces blood sugar).
- Don't wait until you are starving to eat.



In the end – listen to the wisdom of your Buddha-nature; bring your absolute attention to the immediate action of eating. Eat with intention.



Healthy Living

by Kevin Roche

Surviving the
Holiday
Blues

By

Sandra
Bubniak

Excerpted
from

Examiner.com

Some of us having experienced negative childhood or adolescent experiences find the holidays difficult emotionally. For others it is a question of recognizing the change in life's structure as time passes. Some changes are due to the course of natural life passages, others are associated with health challenges, death, or financial crises. These and other issues put us out of sync with the holidays and make facing them uncomfortable.

In *The Therapist's Guide to Clinical Intervention*, 2nd edition (2009) Sharon L Johnson (Academic Press: London) offers suggestions to consider in coping with hurt at holiday times.

1) Develop new traditions (but remember to have realistic expectations about setting out with this). Be aware it will not feel the same as an old tradition and it will take several repetitions before you may begin to look forward to it. This is a situation in which you have control and can make the effort to create something special.

2) Choose participation. Don't isolate yourself. While your enthusiasm may wane socially, do engage yourself. You will probably not be the only one there distracted, which will help you feel better. Feel comfortable about your level of involvement, but even a little will lift spirits.

3) Take care of yourself. Overlook as best you can the commercialization around you. Give yourself some TLC. Do something you have been wanting to do - a movie, a book, music, or write a letter. Let yourself know you count.

4) Volunteer. Focusing outside ourselves reminds us for what we are grateful. Social service organizations or museum programs are places to consider. There are volunteer organizations that are grateful for your time.

5) Talk about it, it is more common than you think. Why is this time more stressful for you? Be informed about community resources. If things get particularly bleak, talk to your doctor or seek professional guidance. You can help yourself with better understanding, self-validation, and working on problem solving.

6) Have foresight. Make a list of what you plan to do, and what you have done in the past, which helped improve your mood. Being prepared can sometimes be a large part of the battle.

National Hotlines:

1-800-TALK- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

CrisisChat.org- online emotional support (approx 12hr/d 7days)

1-877-Vet2-Vet (1-877-838-2838) - Vets crisis hotline

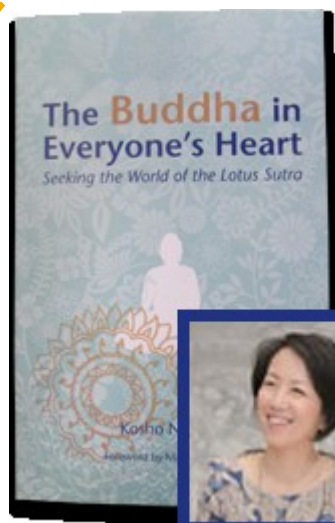
Youth America Hotline (Counseling for teens by teens) - 1-877-968-8459

Common Ground Crisis Services (Pontiac MI) - 1-800-231-1127 or 1-810-456-090

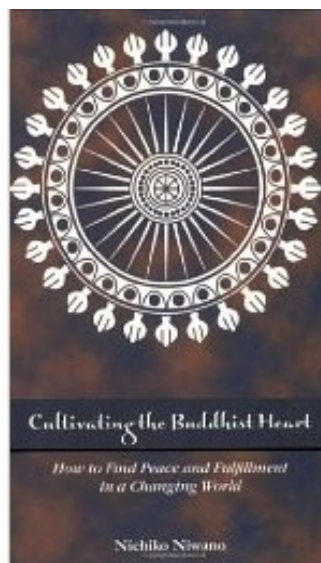
Author Sandra Bubniak

<http://www.examiner.com/review/thanksgiving-surviving-the-holiday-blues>

Bulletin Board



Rev Kosho Niwano's new book is now available for purchase. To obtain your copy contact your minister or RKINA



Cultivating the Buddhist Heart is now available as a Kindle eBook!

Purchase your copy on Amazon for \$4.99 and receive your instant download

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Post your upcoming events!

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If you know someone who does not live near a RK Sangha, but would like to help them on their path, direct them to the online sangha! We meet every Monday evening at 9 EST/6 PST. Password is RKSangha <https://kosei-kai.webex.com/>

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