



Sangha In Motion

Bimonthly eNewsletter for RK Members in the US

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

HIGHLIGHTS

Cherry Blossom Festival

Buddha's Birthday

Lots of news from the
Sanghas!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Top Event	1
Guidance	2
News	3-15
Dear Abdhidharma	16
Senior Living	17
Family	18
Art From the Sanghas	19-21
Book Review	22-23
Bulletin Board	24
How to Submit	24
RK Locations	25

Dayton Summer of Peace Initiative

by Jane Perri

The RK Dayton Dharma Center is launching an initiative that we are calling a "Summer of Peace." We invite all of the Dharma Centers to join us by replicating this in your metropolitan area. The press release below was sent to every media outlet in the Greater Dayton Area, as well as all churches. In the fall SIM, we will report the results by comparing the summer crime statistics from the previous 2 summers with this summer. We encourage you to modify the release and use it for your own "Summer of Peace."

Press Release

During the summer months, the crime rate and unhappiness index goes up. In the early 1980's, there were a series of experiments conducted in Washington DC. Over a couple of summers, a group of people focused their thought intentions on reducing the summer crime rate by 25%. The crime rate did go down. After adjusting for all other variables, the scientists determined that the only thing that was different was the positive intentions of the group. It had worked. Let's try this in Dayton. Let's have our own "Summer of Peace."

Everyone in the Dayton metropolitan area are all part of the community network. Each of us is part of the greater whole and what affects one affects the other. Let us come together to change the atmosphere of separateness and pain to one of unity and joy, in the Dayton area. Join in a one minute period of focused peaceful intention to reduce the crime rates in the Dayton area this summer.

What you can do to contribute to a more connected community. This can be done anywhere, either alone or in the company of others .

On June 21st, at noon, make noise for 15 seconds, ring bells, blow car horns, beat on pots and pans or shout. The sound will remind everyone of and call attention to the upcoming minute.

Then pause for a silent minute of peaceful intention for our community. Direct your thoughts towards harmony with your neighbors and community, peaceful service, compassion, forgiveness, and/or any other positive thoughts that come to mind that invoke peace within you and the community. In your mind, hold these thoughts of peaceful and harmonious neighborhoods for one minute.

Bring this positive energy and focused intention to your own neighborhood where you live and work.

We invite you to carry the intention with you throughout the summer. Every time you hear loud noises this summer return your thoughts to enjoying peaceful neighborhoods.

Please post this to your Facebook, and send it to all of your email contacts, and any organization to which you are connected. Let's get the word out. Have a peaceful and happy summer!



“..the Buddha entrusted the saha-world to the bodhisattvas...”



Guidance from Founder Niwano

Words from the Founder:

"That the Buddha entrusted the saha-world to the bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth teaches us that the world in which we live should be purified and made peaceful through our own efforts as dwellers in the world, and that we should realize happiness in our lives through our own efforts. We are responsible for creating the Pure Land where we live. We should bring about our happiness through our own efforts--what a reassuring and positive teaching this is!" (Buddhism for Today 177)

Commentary by Mary Sigman

With these words from the Founder we find our mission as lay bodhisattvas. First of all, he links all of us to those bodhisattvas that sprang up from the earth in Chapter 15 of **The Lotus Sutra**.

This really and truly puts us in the picture; we are not just observers and bystanders. What the Buddha is talking about in **The Lotus Sutra** involves us, and in a very important way. After the Buddha passes into parinirvana it will be up to us to carry on the work. It is being entrusted to us. And it is not being entrusted to only monks or nuns, or kings, or gods, but to us, the regular folk. And it is only through our hard work on earth that happiness can occur. Moreover, as we bring happiness to others, we bring about our own happiness.

Along with helping others, we can be good lay bodhisattvas by being good role models on earth.

This is another reason why our springing up from the earth is important. As the regular folks of this world, we are not superhuman or endowed with special powers or gifts. We are regular people who live average lives. We suffer and fail like everyone else. But because we aren't special, we can relate to others in their lives and suffering.

If we listen with our heart, we can hear the cries of the world and try to help. And because we aren't special, others can relate to us. They can see that we have gone through life like they have, and hopefully they can also see that we are happier, better people by being lay bodhisattvas.



Los Angeles

Buddha's Birthday Celebration

A Special Ceremony honoring the Buddha's birthday was held on April 6th at Risho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles. Almost 150 members and friends were in attendance on this auspicious occasion where the ceremony was held for the first time outdoors in the front of the Buddhist Center. Following the ceremony, a ritual of pouring sweet tea over the statue of the baby Buddha was held. Afterwards, members gathered for a buffet lunch and entertainment as Risho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles welcomed RKINA, who moved into the Buddhist Center facility on March 22nd.



RKINA Advanced Lotus Seminar



The first session of the 2014-2015 Advanced Lotus Sutra national study was held at the new RKINA offices in the RCLA Dharma Center. Eighteen leaders from six different Rishso Kosei-kai Dharma Centers across the U.S converged in Los Angeles for the first of a series of Advanced Lotus Sutra seminars coordinated by RKINA. Members from Tampa Bay, Fort Myers, San Antonio, Oklahoma, Orange County, and Los Angeles engaged in the intensive study of the first eight chapters of the *Threefold Lotus Sutra* from April 25-27. The seminar also included ritual training and a hoza, where the members shared about their moments of awakening during the weekend.

The main instructor was Rev. Kris Ladusau. She was assisted by Rev. Nick Ozuna. We also were happy to have Rev. Yoshizawa and Rev. Nagata sharing comments with the students. All participants were required to prepare short speeches about the first eight chapters of the Sutra. This was an interactive learning time together. We were very grateful to the LA Dharma Center for hosting.

The next seminar will be held in September, 2014 and all the participants are eagerly awaiting their next opportunity to delve deeply into the Lotus Sutra.





Los Angeles Baby Blessing



On May 4th, a special Baby Blessing Ceremony was held at the LA Buddhist Center. The ceremony was held for the Sonksen family and their newborn Skye Ren Sonksen. This was the first Baby Blessing Ceremony to be held at Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles.





Oklahoma City

by Rev. Kris Ladusau

Several Oklahoma Dharma Center members attended a musical performance including: chanting, playing crystal bowls, drums and didgeridoo. It was a wonderful evening of spiritual practice in prayer.



Native American Ancestors Service

June 8th was our annual memorial service for Native American Ancestors here in Oklahoma.

We placed a peace pipe on the altar along with Indian sacred herbs. We use smudge for incense, played Native American music, offered a special reading, and played the drum in the Indian style.

The service is intended to help heal the many bad things that were done to the Native Americans.



Oklahoma City Interfaith and Retreat

Rev. Kris Ladusau attended the Annual Dinner for CAIR (Council on American/Islamic Relations).

In addition to representing as the Reverend of the RK Dharma Center of Oklahoma she was also there as a board member of both the Interfaith Alliance and Religions United (a subdivision of Oklahoma Council of Churches). The first picture below shows Rev. Kris connecting with religious leaders from Oklahoma.



20 members of the Oklahoma sangha traveled to a retreat center east of Oklahoma City for a two day Dharma retreat. Nature was the perfect atmosphere for good sessions of Dharma discussion, meditation and chanting. It was all fueled by good healthy vegetarian food.

San Antonio

by Kevin Roche



“We can learn from plants”

What is happening in San Antonio

The San Antonio Sangha has agreed to participate in the Donate a Meal Program established by Founder Niwano. This group of Bodhisattvas have determined to forego 1 lunch each month in a united effort to provide funds for people being affected by food instability. These good folks recognize a very real need for meal assistance here in San Antonio and understand that by donating the funds for even one meal per month, a real difference can be made in the lives of others.

On May 24, 2014 a group of hard working individuals, members of the San Antonio Sangha, crawled out of comfortable beds and traipsed out into the early morning darkness, pelted by rain, to donate their time and effort to beautifying the Dharma Center sign. Ladders, paint, paintbrushes, stir sticks, drop clothes, rags, and various other tools were used in this combined effort of donation. The sign has taken on a new life and is sure to attract many new friends. So many have come by already and when asked "What brought you here?" respond with the answer "The sign." It will be exciting to see what a few hours of sweat and grime along with a fresh coat of paint will bring. Thank you wonderful San Antonio members!

The new community garden has been completed with thanks to many San Antonio Sangha members. Piloted by Kevin Filipek, Liam Sherwood and Kevin Roche, this garden promises to be a way for the San Antonio Sangha to commune together in nature. As the Sangha was sharing in conversation last week during Tuesday night Lotus Sutra class, some folks, new to the teachings, shared that they felt a bit lost and uncomfortable in their ability to understand the content of what was being read. Many experienced members shared that they too, at times, had had difficulty in understanding the Sutra. They assured the newcomers that with patience and perseverance, understanding would surely come. A college student who has been a member of the San Antonio Sangha for a little over a year offered a heartfelt glimpse into the lessons that our newly built garden could teach us. Taylor Wilson shared the insight that plants cannot be "made "to grow faster. They must be nurtured, weeded, fed, and watered. In their own time, a plant will come into its full potential. Taylor commented that people can learn from plants and maybe even find compassion for themselves and others in our attempts to understand the profound teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Thank you Taylor!



Members of the SA sangha saying goodbye and expressing their profound gratitude to Rev. Kohno for his compassionate guidance.

Sangha members hard at work, building a community garden



Reverend Okada demonstrating his construction skills in the garden project



All sentient beings enjoy the refreshment of the backyard at the SA Dharma Center.



A new outdoor meditation circle that several sangha members donated for us!



RK SA sangha members putting a fresh coat of paint on the sign



The San Antonio Advanced Sutra Study group attending the class in LA. Left to right : Ashley Schauer, Karen George, Rick Garrahan, Mariano Velez, Taylor Wilson, and Susan Bryant



*Buddha's
Birthday
Celebration*

Ft. Myers Activities

by Mary Sigman

On April 6, our sangha celebrated Buddha's Birthday with a full ceremony for the first time. We all enjoyed the beautiful ceremony in the lovely outdoors. We also participated in the Lee Interfaith for Empowerment Rally for social justice on April 7. Five of our members, along with their friends, joined with ten other churches to show support.

Member Jen Yontz-Orlando attended the Advanced Lotus Sutra seminar April 25-27 at LA Church. In May, we gained two new members, Rene and Judit Svoboda. Many of our members have been away in May, so things were a bit quieter.



Front: Nick Orlando, Jen Yontz-Orlando
Back: Alice Melzer, Rene Svoboda, Valerie Stevens, Jerry Freeman, Nadine Landreth, Judith Freeman

Ft. Myers Lee Interfaith for Empowerment Rally



San Francisco

by Stephanie Meyer



Cherry Blossom Festival

We have had an activity-filled spring so far. Reverend Nagashima has continued to hold his monthly Dharma Talks in English and Japanese with some public attendance in addition to members. We held the annual ceremony celebrating the Buddha's birth and poured sweet tea over the statue surrounded by fresh and beautiful flowers.



Cherry Blossom Festival - Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

On April 20th, Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco participated in the annual Cherry Blossom Festival Grand Parade. More than 50 members participated from San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle. The theme of the parade was "Let's Bring Joy to Others by Enjoying Ourselves!" and the participants truly did radiate joy throughout.

A lecture by RKINA, a BBQ, and a rehearsal were also held the day before. Thousands of people came out to see Rissho Kosei-kai perform matoi and narimono in San Francisco's Japan Town.



Cherry Blossom Festival Parade!



Twirling the matoi at one of the key spots on the parade route.





Distinguished member is honored for her poetry

Dayton

by Jane Perri

Dayton's own Poet Laureate Kathy Austin was invited to create and present her poetry at the annual Art and Poetry Night at the Dayton Art Institute. Each year a unique and talented artist is showcased in the Special Exhibits gallery. Accomplished poets are then invited to create poems that are inspired by the works of art. This year, the exhibit was designed to raise awareness about animals that are near extinction. In the photo, Kathy is standing in front of one of the paintings.



Other news

Dr. Jane Perri earned her second doctorate in March. This time it was in Holistic Theology and Ministry. A large component of the program was focused on Buddhism. Jane was ordained as an Interfaith Minister on May 31st. through the Order of International Interfaith Clergy. Her dissertation will be the foundation of an upcoming book that is in the final draft phase now.



A Visit from OKC

Jan and Dave Rose from OKC visited the Dayton Center on June 8th. Dave led our service and hoza. The hoza was a discussion on the "The Bodhisattva Path" which was an outshoot from the OKC retreat. The next page is the reading that was used for the service, written by Dave. Sorry, we were having too good of a time to remember to take pictures!

New Members

Last but certainly not least, we have two new members, Celeste French and Rachel Johnson. The sisters have been attending the Basic and Advanced Teaching classes for over a year and have now joined us as official members. They are a wonderful addition to our family!

The Bodhisattva Path

by Dave Rose

Founder Niwano, who we sometimes refer to as the “Great teacher of the One Vehicle” was fond of saying that “Enlightenment is in the encounter.” It was such a part of his life that in her book about her grandfather’s teachings, ‘The Buddha in Everyone’s Heart,’ Rev. Kosho Niwano addressed a whole chapter to “Encounters.”

But what you may ask, is an encounter? An encounter is simply a meeting between a cause and a condition. As you move through your day, everything you come into contact with is a “condition” to your “cause.” Encounters are the workings of causation in our lives. Good causes typically lead to good results and bad causes lead to bad results.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed at the prospect of living life as a bodhisattva. It seems way beyond our reach where we are in our life. However, if we let go of expectations for some Gandhi like experience and just focus on what is in front of us at that moment, we can see that enlightenment is right here, right now, in this encounter, with a simple act of compassion. The bodhisattva path is addressing your encounters as you would like others to address you and being a cause for happiness in your life and those around you.





*Circling in
the Realms*

Dear Abdhi-dharma by Rev. Kris

Dear Abhi-dharma –

Recently I became very angry with my husband when I thought he was not helping me as much as he should around the house. As I felt the anger come up in me – I became worried that ANGER was my true nature which I usually covered up with a compassionate personality. Can you help me understand this?
Fuming in Florida

Dear Fuming –

There is absolutely no need to worry or to think that anger is your true nature – because it is not !

You are simply experiencing a ride in the “six realms,” as we call it in Buddhism. Feelings of anger can come up at any time. It is part of being human. The good thing is, when they do – we can acknowledge them and make a choice on how we want to respond. This is possible because we continually work to increase our awareness. Usually anger comes up when we feel that our “sense of self” has been bruised or disrespected in some way. First, we need to have compassion for ourselves (for putting ourselves into suffering), then have compassion for the “other person.” Finally, when you make the highest choice possible for all involved, you will escape the six realms and return to your compassionate heart and mind.

Your TRUE nature is your Buddha-Nature. The same essence as the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni.

Gassho,
Abhi-dharma





Senior Living

Would you rather work with a team of experienced people or a team of inexperienced, but enthusiastic, people?

When asked as part of an exercise, my ESL (English as a Second Language) learners reply from both sides of the question. But now and then one will say, "It doesn't matter, as long as the work gets done."

In Chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, we learn about the bodhisattvas springing up from under the earth. Neither Shakyamuni nor anyone else described their appearance, personalities, experience or age. They were, and are, just there to get the work done.

Shakyamuni preached that age is not a reason to retire from our practice. Founder Niwano's writings remind us of this point.

As we know, experience isn't necessarily a matter of age. Chronologically young

people can have a lot of experience in some areas, while older people can be beginners. But the generation gap can be a cause of conflict in how to get things done.

Speaking from the side of experience and age, I agree with those who say that everyone who can do the work should participate. If we get ego out of the way, we can see the merge and flow of new and long-accepted ideas and the blending of conventional and innovative ways of doing things. Then we see progress. When we butt heads there is no movement, or negative movement.

In a lay practice, we are guides and we have guides. Hopefully, we are blessed with old timers and beginners in our sanghas. We have the richness of tradition and the promise of the future. When these join and function as one, we are harmoniously getting the Buddha's work done.

If we get ego out of the way, we can see the merge and flow of new and long-accepted ideas and the blending of conventional and innovative ways of doing things.



Family Matters—Beauty and Gray A Wise Leader

Buddhist Tales for Young & Old
Prince Goodspeaker www.buddhanet.net



Once upon a time, there was a deer who was the leader of a herd of a thousand. He had two sons. One was very slim and tall, with bright alert eyes, and smooth reddish fur. He was called Beauty. The other was gray in color, also slim and tall, and was called Gray.

One day, after they were fully grown, their father called Beauty and Gray to him. He said, "I am now very old, so I cannot do all that is necessary to look after this big herd of deer, I want you, my two grown children, to be the leaders, while I retire from looking after them all the time. We will divide the herd and each of you will lead 500 deer." So it was done.

In India, when the harvest time comes, the deer are always in danger. The rice is at its tallest and the deer cannot help but go into the paddies and eat it. To avoid the destruction of their crops, the human beings dig pits, set sharp stakes in the ground, and build stone traps—all to capture and kill the deer.

Knowing this was the season, the wise old deer called the two new leaders to him. He advised them to take the herds up into the mountain forest, far from the dangerous farm lands. This was how he had always saved the deer from being wounded or killed. Then he would bring them back to the low lands after the harvest was over.

Since he was too old and weak for the trip, he would remain behind in hiding. He warned them to be careful and have a safe journey. Beauty set out with his herd for the mountain forest and so did Gray with his.

The villagers all along the way knew that this was the time the deer moved from the low lying farm lands to the high country side. So they hid along the way and killed the deer as they passed by.

Gray did not pay attention to his father's wise advice. Instead of being careful and traveling safely, he was in a hurry to get to the lush mountain forest. So he moved his herd constantly, during the night, at dawn and dusk, even

in broad daylight. This made it easy for the people to shoot the deer in Gray's herd with bows and arrows. Many were killed, and many were wounded, only to die in pain later on. Gray reached the forest with only a few deer remaining alive.

The tall sleek red-furred Beauty, was wise enough to understand the danger to his moving herd. So he was very careful. He knew it was safer to stay away from the villages, and from all humans. He knew it was not safe in the daytime, or even at dawn or dusk. So he led his herd wide around the villages, and moved only in the middle of the night. Beauty's herd arrived in the mountain forest safe and sound, with no one killed or injured.

The two herds found each other, and remained in the mountains until well after the harvest season was over. Then they began the return to the farmland country.

Gray had learned nothing from the first trip. As it was getting cold in the mountains, he was in a hurry to get to the warmer low lands. So he was just as careless as before. Again the people hid along the way and attacked and killed the deer. All Gray's herd were killed, later to be eaten or sold by the villagers. Gray himself was the only one who survived the journey.

Beauty led his herd in the same careful way as before. He brought back all 500 deer, completely safe. While the deer were still in the distance, the old chief said to his doe, "Look at the deer coming back to us. Beauty has all his followers with him. Gray comes limping back alone, without his herd of 500. Those who follow a wise leader, with good qualities, will always be safe. Those who follow a foolish leader, who is careless and thinks only of himself, will fall into troubles and be destroyed."

After some time, the old deer died and was reborn as he deserved. Beauty became chief of the herd and lived a long life, loved and admired by all.

THE MORAL IS: A wise leader puts the safety of his followers first.

Poetry by Kathy Austin - Dayton



Poetry Corner

Unseen Bodhisattvas by Rita Coleman

Think of the unseen bodhisattvas that
slip unnoticed through the seams
in your life.

Animate, inanimate, seen, unseen.
Emanating. Felt.

Gauzy, round, webbed,
a dream catcher woven with purpose,
interpreting visions, bestowing the best.

Still, sculpted, a morning rabbit,
brown eyes glistening its only hint
of corneal humor.

Hushed zephyr, subtle, drifting onto
bare arms, vulnerable to the cross-breeze
that wafts, shifts.

Unseen bodhisattvas, uninterested in nir-
vana,
hover on seashore minds.

Their capacity for enlightenment requires
no form, no shape, no size, no heartbeat.
A handles for amazement is its genius.

Bodhisattvas by Kathy Austin

I wander among the eons of footsteps,
the smiles of thousands of years.
The world is full of unseen Bodhisattvas,
unworshipped, unrecognized,
yet they still continue on.

They are the gentle hand
on the fevered forehead.
They are the kind eyes
sitting next to me on the bus;
or a spontaneous offer of praise;
the generous gift of time
in a week crammed and demanding.

But then one day
one may appear like my mother,
who after her death
returned to me, stood beside me
to say, "Now,
you must be the teacher."

Kathy Austin has been a featured guest several times on WYSO Public Radio where she has been interviewed and shared her poems. She also makes appearances at various locations around Dayton Ohio to share her poetry.



Art from the Sanghas by Rose Cirigliano

Special Exhibition by Masayoshi Iimura in NY

Masayoshi Iimura, Dojo-cho from the New York Branch, participated in a Sogetsu Ikebana Group Exhibition "Dancing with Flowers" at The Nippon Club Gallery on 57th Street on Thursday, March 27 to Saturday, March 29, 2014. Iimura-san who has been practicing Ikebana for the past 10 years, appeared with 23 other Ikebana flower arrangers as well as Judith Setsuko Hata, Master Ikebana Arranger. In Japan, there are many forms of Ikebana schools. However, Sogetsu is considered one of the three major Ikebana disciplines in the 20th century. In 1927, Master Sofu Teshigahara introduced the concept of allowing the "freedom of the self-expression" while respecting ancient Ikebana tradition. Thus, in "Sogetsu, Past meets Present," Teshigahara encouraged the use of creative ideas from the student.

R.C. How did you become involved with this Art form?

Iimura-san: I was always interested in learning flower arrangements. Ten years ago, I signed up for 3 months of classes. I didn't want to stop because the more I learned the more I wanted to learn. I found it needs more and more time to be an expert. Even today, I still don't feel like an expert. But, I do feel a sense of accomplishment after each class.

What makes me happy is that I carry the flowers back to RK Dharma Center and everyone can see the arrangements. This is my weekly donation. Since I've been there so long, now I volunteer to help my teacher, Mrs. Hata. Mrs. Hata is 88 years old. Every Thursday morning, she drives from New Jersey to New York to buy the flowers in the Flower district on 28th and brings them to the Nippon Club on 57th Street. Because of the city traffic, it is almost impossible for her to deliver the flowers. Therefore, I wait for Mrs. Hata at curbside. When she arrives, I carry the bundles of flowers to our classroom. It is something I look forward to every week.



Ikebana
Exhibition







The Vimalakirti Sutra

The Vimalakirti Sutra invites us as lay people to change our perception of ourselves and realize there are unbounded and limitless possibilities.

Book Review by Nancy Anderson

The Vimalakirti Sutra

Translated by John R. McRae

By now most of us have come to understand that bodhisattvas have distinguishing characteristics that set them apart from others. When it comes to wisdom, we think of Manjushri. When we think of compassion, we think of Avalokiteshvara. There is one bodhisattva, however, that seems to defy any one-word description. Who is this person, anyway?

From the pages of Mahayana literature steps a larger-than-life lay bodhisattva named Vimalakirti. He was a lay person, a businessman, and a scholar. He mixed with people from all walks of life, even those some self-proclaimed high-minded people might consider “improper.” He went into taverns, brothels and other so-called unsavory places, and he went into these places to teach the Dharma. Beyond that, however, there was something even more unusual about Vimalakirti. He was a contemporary of the Buddha, and worked in partnership with him training bodhisattvas, heavenly kings, Indras, gods, dragons, monks and nuns, lay people and a host of others. For those of us who have come to think that bodhisattvas are made here on Earth through the long and arduous journey of lifetimes, we learn from this sutra that *some* bodhisattvas are born here as certifiable, recognizable bodhisattvas, but made in other worlds. Vimalakirti is one of them. In *The Vimalakirti Sutra* the Buddha explained to Shariputra that “There is a country called Wondrous Joy, where the Bud-

dha is entitled Akasobhya. Vimalakirti died in that country prior to being born here.” And why did he come to this world after living in a pure land? We find a clue in answer to this question as the Buddha describes what we humans are like here on Earth.

This “Saha” land, as titled in the sutra, is one that requires bodhisattvas with special skill sets. The recalcitrant people of this world (that would be us) are described with “minds like monkeys” and, says the Buddha, “...one must use several types of Dharma to control their minds...” Vimalakirti's motivation to come to this world and teach, after living in the rare atmosphere of a pure land, had to be one of compassion. For us. One particular teaching in this sutra speaks clearly to those of us who, with our monkey minds, wonder why our lives seem so troublesome. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why can't we all be born as Buddhas in a pure land and skip the messy stuff?

Manjushri, in dialogue with Vimalakirti, says “It is just as lotus flowers do not grow on dry land on the high plateaus – these flowers grow in the muddy filth of the lowly marshes.” In short, *no mud, no lotus*. He went on to say, “Therefore you should understand that all the afflictions constitute the seed of the Tathagata. It is like not being able to attain the priceless jewel-pearl without entering the ocean.”

As most of us have discovered, living

The Vimalakirti Sutra

here on Earth as humans is serious and sometimes difficult business. It is not one continuous joy ride as we might wish. To save the day, lest we get mired in despair over this, the sutra also has its moments of humor and magic.

When 500 bodhisattvas, one by one, declined the Buddha's request to go to Vimalakirti and inquire about his illness, we are a bit incredulous about their reluctance to do what the Buddha himself has asked. Each had some excuse why they could not go visit him.

Finally Manjushri agreed to go. Sensing that there might be a dialogue between Manjushri and Vimalakirti worth hearing, others became interested. "At the time eight thousand bodhisattvas, five hundred shravakas and a hundred thousand gods wanted to follow along."

Considering the fact that Vimalakirti's small sick room contained only one piece of furniture, a couch, it's a tall order to think the retinue 'following along' could be accommodated in such a small space. But when we enter the dreamy world depicted in sutras where flowers fall from the heavens and pure lands sparkle with jewels, anything can happen.

And perhaps that is why sutras in general always include what seems to be the impossible – our minds are cracked open so something can be dropped in. In the case of Vimalakirti's sick room, thrones were provided for everyone and no one was crowded. If we consider Vimalakirti's sick room symbolic of our small, sick minds, we find a very valid comparison. There are many teachings in this sutra, for example, that remove all barriers to any aspiration we may have to take the Bodhisattva Vow. We learn, for example, that women as well as men can become

enlightened. We learn, too, that enlightenment is not reserved for monastic's and priests, but for all lay people as well. We already knew that, didn't we.

And there are more complicated ideas addressed here as well. For those who like to grapple with complex ideas, the concept of non-duality provides challenge and also understanding. An entire chapter on nonduality written in entertaining dialogue provides our ticket-to-ride. In the end, Vimalakirti's thunderous silence ends the discussion, commented upon by Manjushri. "Excellent, excellent!" he says. "Not to even have words or speech is the true entrance into the Dharma gate of nonduality." Some things simply defy verbal description.

Sutras are Dharma teaching tools, and *The Vimalakirti Sutra* invites us as lay people to change our perception of ourselves and realize there are unbounded and limitless possibilities. Clothed in humor, irony, drama and magic, eternal truths pop from the pages of this sutra into our minds.

The Vimalakirti Sutra is definitely worth the effort and the journey.

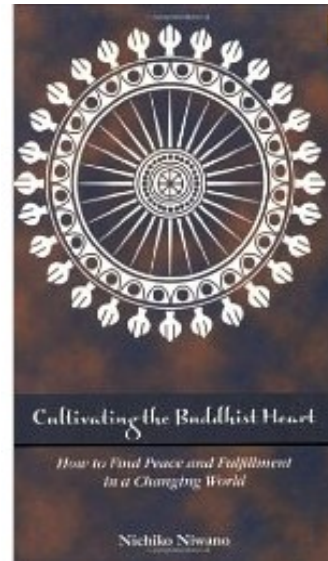
Note: The version of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* used for this review was translated from the Chinese by the John R. McRae and published by Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai and Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Berkeley, CA, 2004.

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Bulletin Board



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Cultivating the Buddhist Heart is available as a Kindle eBook!

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Locations and Calendar of Centers

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (Los Angeles CA)

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Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Tampa Bay (FL)

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii (Pearl City, Oahu)

Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center (HI)

Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Dharma Center (HI)

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Los Angeles (CA)

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of San Antonio (TX)

Rissho Kosei-kai of Buddhist Center of Arizona (Tucson)

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Colorado (Denver)

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Diego (CA)

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Las Vegas (NV)

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco (CA)

Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's Buddhist Learning Center (WA)

Rissho Kosei-kai of Sacramento (CA)

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Jose (CA)

Lotus Buddhist Circle of San Mateo (CA)

Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver (Canada)

Rissho Kosei-kai of New York (NY)

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago (IL)

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ft. Myers

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma (OKC)

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dallas

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Denver (CO)

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Klamath Falls (OR)

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton (OH)