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# LOTUS ON THE BAYOU

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Newsletter of Myoken Temple, Houston



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## YEAR OF THE TIGER—2010

The upcoming YEAR OF THE TIGER actually begins on February 14, 2010. I thought it would be a good time to consider what that means—especially if one follows the zodiac. The Buddhist guardian for the year is Kokuzo, the same as for the 2009 Year of the Ox. Kokuzo symbolizes the "vast and boundless" Buddha wisdom that permeates the universe. Believers pray to Kokuzo to grant them wisdom on their quest toward enlightenment. In Japan, Kokuzo is also venerated for the ability to fulfill wishes. In particular, people pray to Kokuzo to improve their memory, technical skills, and artistic talents, for Kokuzo is revered not only as the wisdom-bestowing Bodhisattva, but as the patron of craftspeople and artisans.

It is said that Nichiren Shonin hoped to be the wisest person in Japan, and prayed to Kokuzo for wisdom. According to legend, Nichiren had a strange dream on the 21<sup>st</sup> day after he had started his prayers. An old priest of about sixty who had a crystal juzu in his left hand and a large sparkling jewel in his right hand appeared. The old priest came to the back gate of the temple where Nichiren Shonin was chanting, and said, "Let me give you wisdom," and threw the jewel at him. The jewel passed through his breast, and into his left sleeve. It is said that from this moment, he could understand everything he studied perfectly.

I continue to develop a rhythm of blogging so I can produce a newsletter on a regular basis. SIGH. As is so evident, I still have not managed to make this happen. It's time to turn over a new page and walk a different path—you know, crazy is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. I'm just not going to be crazy that way again. It's time to begin from a different place and try a different road. You'll all know how this comes along! If I can only manage to stop feeling like a chicken with my head cut off . . .

On October 25, we held a retreat at our prison sangha in Navasota. Eight folks took refuge; four of them became members of Nichiren Shu. Two of our members have moved on: Lonnie Henderson and Albert Mason—on the path to release. We are all grateful for the time we spent in friendship together and hope we continue to be together in the future. We have lost the threads of connection with so many others; yet, they are still in our hearts.

We had a great article published in the Houston Chronicle which is attached to this newsletter so you all may see it. The reporter, Zen, and the photographers, Eric and Julio, felt like friends and the result is quite evident in the article. It feels good to run into like-minded folks.

I have done a good bit of running around this year and have had wonderful experiences. I participated in a weekend called "Vets Journey Home" which really changed my life in a

南無妙法蓮華經

very specific way. I never considered myself a vet because I never served in a war and I was never full time—only a reservist. I do know that my work benefitted others, but never felt that I had the right to the label. I have changed my mind because these folks made me part of the family and honored my service. I know that among you all are veterans—and I want you to know that there are tons of folks out there who truly honor your service and are grateful. So for them—and just so you vets know—THANK YOU!

I attended a workshop on managing conflict taught by one of the most gentle and peaceful men I have ever encountered. He is heart of an organization known as Stir Fry Seminars as well as the maker of a film "The Color of Fear." If ever you get the chance to see this film in a safe environment where folks hold the space for you to process the incredible feelings that arise, take the opportunity. It is powerful and will open your eyes and heart to the power of a diverse community. None of us need be separate and alone—there is for each of us a place of safety and connection within the sangha. We are all especially fortunate if our sanghas are diverse and rich with the fabulous weave and textures of cultures—how much richer we can be from the enhancement!

One thing to think about this upcoming year is the sangha. "A sangha is a community of friends practicing the dharma together in order to bring about and to maintain awareness. The essence of a sangha is awareness, understanding, acceptance, harmony and love. . . . [T]he elements of sangha are the taste of life, the taste of liberation. . . . When we say, "I take refuge in the sangha," it is not a statement, it is a practice." [Thich Nhat Hanh]

What does it mean to us? For many of us, sangha is a difficult concept to entertain—especially if we come from an individualistic background rather than a communal one. Generally, it's "all about me" and fitting into and/or working with members of one's sangha present unique challenges when that is the case.

There are two contrasting analogies which may be applicable to the idea of sangha: a barrel of potatoes or a barrel of crabs. In a barrel of potatoes, each potato bounces against the others and knocks off all of the dirt, thus cleaning all the potatoes. In a barrel of crabs, the minute one crab reaches the top, the other crabs try to pull him back down into the mix. Where would you rather be?

This much I do know. When we take refuge, we are placing our faith in the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) and the precepts (not to kill, not to steal, not to indulge in harmful sexual activity, not to lie, not to indulge in intoxicants). By means of these four objects of faith, our goal is

to transform the world into a place of peace and happiness. This is no easy task because we must first tame that within us which refuses to be in oneness with another being. Sometimes it is easier to be alone rather than to challenge ourselves to open our hearts to allow others to enter. If we are really serious about our own journey to enlightenment, we cannot forget the vows we utter daily . . . 'we vow to save all beings.' That vow cannot be accomplished in isolation, without making the deepest kind of connection, without recognition of the inseparability of all things. Sangha allows us to create the opportunity for oneness where none exists—and we can do this because we have faith in the Buddha and the essential quality of his words—the Dharma.

A Japanese poet, also a Buddhist, Kenji Miyazawa often wrote of the struggle of trying to be a person who did not think of himself . . . .

### Strong in the Rain

Strong in the rain  
 Strong in the wind  
 Strong against the summer heat and snow  
 He is healthy and robust  
 Free from desire  
 He never loses his temper  
 Nor the quiet smile on his lips  
 He eats four go of unpolished rice  
 Miso and a few vegetables a day  
 He does not consider himself  
 In whatever occurs . . . his understanding  
 Comes from observation and experience  
 And he never loses sight of things  
 He lives in a little thatched-roof hut  
 In a field in the shadows of a pine tree grove  
 If there is a sick child in the east  
 He goes there to nurse the child  
 If there's a tired mother in the west  
 He goes to her and carries her sheaves  
 If someone is near death in the south  
 He goes and says, "Don't be afraid"  
 If there are strife and lawsuits in the north  
 He demands that the people put an end to their pettiness  
 He weeps at the time of drought  
 He plods about at a loss during the cold summer  
 Everyone calls him Blockhead  
 No one sings his praises  
 Or takes him to heart . . .  
 That is the kind of person  
 I want to be  
 © "Strong in the Rain" by Kenji Miyazawa;  
 translation © Roger Pulvers

It's a topic I'm sure will be revisited again and again—our journey to enlightenment is a solitary journey as no one can reach enlightenment for us. However, our cultivation of friends along the way only strengthens our resolve and our determination due to the support and encouragement of those friends in the Dharma—our sangha.

My recent experience of teaching at the 11<sup>th</sup> Shami Conference with Rev. Hirai, Rev. Faulconer, and the Shomyo masters, Rev. Yazawa and Rev. Kawasaki, from Japan, was

another lesson in being part of a sangha. It certainly broadened my 'world view' of how sangha can be formed and really work successfully with complete strangers to produce an amazing result. I was moved daily by the efforts of all the ministers as well as Mrs. Hirai and Mrs. Kawasaki, who supported the entire adventure behind the scenes—doing the most important task of feeding us wonderful vegetarian food. The result was a seamless flow of energy directed toward one goal—that of really providing the shami a worthwhile and educational experience. It's always a wonderful realization when one's eyes are opened to a new reality with a deeper understanding of the intersection and interconnection of all the energy directed toward accomplishing a goal. There is beauty in being able to work together without ego getting in the way, without all those pesky personal things that can often do damage to relationships within a sangha. I was completely reminded of the words of Don Miguel Ruiz in 'The Four Agreements' which many of you have no doubt heard me rave about.

- (1) Be impeccable with your word;
- (2) Don't take anything personally;
- (3) Don't make assumptions; and
- (4) Always do your best.

A great code of conduct by which to live and find freedom from all the unnecessary burdens that weigh us down in relationships.

I am including here an interview with Rep. John Lewis which speaks of the idea of a "beloved community"—much like what I think about when I think of sangha. Rep. Lewis comes at this from a specific arena but the vision is of greater community here in the US.

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### "HATE IS TOO HEAVY A BURDEN TO BEAR": An Interview with Rep. John Lewis December 20th, 2005

REP. JOHN LEWIS: . . . In Selma, Alabama, in March of 1965, about 600 of us decided to take a peaceful, orderly nonviolent walk from Selma to Montgomery to dramatize to the nation that people of color wanted the right to vote, to participate in a democratic process. In Selma only 2.1 percent of blacks of voting age were registered to vote. You could only attempt to get in to take the so-called "literacy" test on the first and third Mondays of each month. And we all started walking in twos.

. . . On the other side at the foot of the bridge [outside Selma] we saw Sheriff Clark, the sheriff of Dallas County in Selma, with his posse. We saw men on horseback, and we heard a man say — Major John Clough of the Alabama State troopers — "this is an unlawful march, and I give you three minutes to disperse, and return to your church." In less than a minute and a half he said, "Troopers advance." And these men came toward us, beating us with nightsticks, bullwhips, trampling us with horses... They used tear gas. And that day became known as "Bloody Sunday." ...I was beaten. I had a concussion. ...I thought that day I was going to die. I think I saw death.

DAVID GERGEN: I found it remarkable in your book and, indeed, in your conversation today how little hate there is. You never expressed a word of hatred for those who were beating you.

REP. JOHN LEWIS: Well, hate is too heavy a burden to bear. And if you accept nonviolence as a way of life, as a way of living, then you must be true, you must be consistent. Because if you only accept nonviolence as a technique or as a tactic, it becomes like a faucet. You can turn it on and turn it off. You have to go around deciding who you're going to hate and who you're going to love today, who you're going to like or dislike, and I can truly say that I don't have any ill feeling or malice or hatred toward anyone that attacked me or had me arrested or jailed during that period. I saw the men and women that engaged in the violence and the mob, whether it was a Bull Connor in Birmingham or a Sheriff Clark in Selma, as victims. We all were victims.

DAVID GERGEN: Selma, of course, led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and many other changes. You speak in the book frequently about a notion from Martin Luther King that moved you so much in those days, a notion of "beloved community." What has happened to the beloved community in America today?

REP. JOHN LEWIS: We have not yet created the beloved community. I think that idea — it's still in the process of becoming. But we cannot give up on it, and some people will say that the idea of the beloved community, the idea of an inter-racial democracy, the idea of integration itself, some people will say it's old fashioned, it's obsolete, it is out of date. But I consider it one of those immutable principles that we shouldn't give up, we shouldn't deviate from it. We have an obligation, I think, as Americans, to create one family, one house, one community, an American community, the American house, the American family.

This interview of Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) was conducted by David Gergen on the Public Broadcasting System's Lehrer News Hour on July 7, 1998. Lewis was one of the key leaders of the US Civil Rights Movement. He is the author of *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*.

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This should be called a newsletter of poetry as we are gifted this month with a variety of poetry. The following is a short poem written in 1875 by William Ernest Henley, which now the title of a new film featuring Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela. The poem entitled "Invictus" was one that Mandela carried with him while in prison.

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

Our former sangha member, Michael Lefebvre, now a student in New York, offers the following poems inspired by his Buddhist faith.

## Springing Up From The Earth

“These Bodhisattvas have supernatural powers  
And the great power of wisdom.  
The ground of this world quaked and cracked.  
They sprang up from under the four quarters of this world. ”  
- Lotus Sutra, Chapter 15

With Punk Rock, Lotus Throne, Light's Golden Sound,  
we sing a mantra to call  
the Bodhisattvas From Underground.

Our true strength is profound  
love. With this, there are no walls.  
With Punk Rock, Lotus Throne, Light's Golden Sound,

we are Awake! Your soul is not bound  
by strife or misery. We can be all  
Bodhisattvas From Underground.

We can rage with the light and shaking ground-  
compassion the guide to enthrall.  
With Punk Rock, Lotus Throne, Light's Golden Sound,

freedom comes from below the ground.  
Be like the Garuda; fly, don't crawl,  
rail the Bodhisattvas From Underground.

Break the rules! It's your mind that's the battle ground!.  
Toss off that fascist caterwaul.  
Be Punk Rock on a Lotus Throne, emitting Light's Golden  
Sound!  
Be the Bodhisattvas From Underground!

## Weapon of Mass Instruction- The Sword of Fudo Myo-o

This sword,  
Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,

is the sky-searing ink of a thousand poets,  
the power of the pen, heart and mind,  
pain, anguish, misery, anger  
rolled into one piece:  
books, diatribes,  
declarations of creative war.

This sword,  
Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,

is the vitality of the world,  
passionately thrust into  
the quagmire by  
naked warrior souls.

It is  
a woman, man, child, teacher,  
unbound spirit,  
the recesses of the universe,  
the flip side of a mad world.

We wield the sword,  
Namu Myoho Renge Kyo:

Selfless action.  
Intangibility.  
Compassion the action which can never be stopped.

Many cut throats for a world of shallow beauty,  
wallow in categories.

We destroy their oppression by raising the sword,  
Namu Myoho Renge Kyo:

Replacing negative with positive,  
Swords cross,  
Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,  
at the center of our chests.

The real war,  
always being,  
in our heads.

So, it is time to end this newsletter so I can at least have it actually mailed out. I include finally the Bishop's New Year's Letter.

### NICHIREN BUDDHIST ORDER OF NORTH AMERICA

3920 Spencer Street  
Las Vegas, NY 89119-5201

**Be Happy by Chanting O'Daimoku!**

### HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Be happy throughout 2010 by chanting "Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo" wherever you are whatever you are doing! Regardless of your faith, you can chant it! We, Nichiren Buddhists, hold morning and/or evening service at [our] homes every day. Besides the services, I [also] chant the Odaimoku all day long. I chant it while changing clothing, going up and down the stairways, walking, tidying up the rooms, cooking, dish washing, etc. Furthermore I have also been trying to chant "Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo" for one hour sharp with one candle light and incense in the evening for one hundred days. But I excuse myself from doing so while I am out of town. I will be done pretty soon. It has become more habitual, and I appreciate that I have time to do so. During the first half hour I chant for cleansing my ordinary sins and slandering the Lotus Sutra in the past. Nichiren Buddhists do not ask to erase his or her sins to gods or Buddha, rather we repent and do good deeds to erase the sins. When we chant "Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo", it is a vow to follow the wonderful laws, and also it is Buddha's and deities' vows to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. During the last half, I pray various prayers for members and followers who requests me to pray and also pray for all mankind to be saved by the power of the Wonderful Dharma, "Myo-ho." And I conclude the chanting with gratitude for the day.

The "Ho" means the universal laws, Buddha's Teachings, constitution of a country, rules in your family, and also traffic rules. Even small children know to stop at the red signal. By following the rules and laws, we are safe and protected. When you chant the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra, you vow to follow the rules and Buddha Dharma even if you do not know the meaning of the Odaimoku.

Therefore, when you continuously chant the Odaimoku, you will naturally follow righteousness without knowing, and you will be protected and be happy, and then the people around you will become happy, too.

If you want to improve yourself, it does not matter whether you are a Nichiren Buddhist or not, try to chant it all day long, whatever you are doing and wherever you are for a month. You will notice something change within you.

Bishop Shokai Kanai

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