

BRIGHT DAWN CENTER OF ONENESS BUDDHISM

Buddhism with Attitude: Keeping it REAL and ALIVE

Rev. Koyo Kubose and his father, Rev. Gyomay Kubose, continued the mission started by Honen and Shinran—bringing the Dharma to everyone in their everyday lives. Rev. Gyomay Kubose's lifework was dedicated to promoting Buddhism in America, so that the Dharma could be part of the lives of those in a Western culture, where Buddhism was not native. In his words:

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

Rev. Gyomay Kubose lived his life energized by this calling. He founded the Buddhist Temple of Chicago in 1944 and worked as its head minister until retiring at the age of 86. He was recognized as a true pioneer in the Westernization of Buddhism and received multiple awards, including the prestigious religious award from the Bukkyo Denso Kyoki (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) for his international missionary work. He was active in Japanese culture and the arts, and in his local community, including the Boy Scouts of American, the City of Chicago, and the Japanese American Service Community.

Born in San Francisco on June 21, 1905, Masao Kubose was the son of Japanese immigrants. When he was three he was sent to live with his father's family in Japan, following his parents' divorce. He returned to the United States when he was 17. Although he was raised in a Buddhist family, he was not interested in religion until he met Rev. Taigan Hata of the Oakland Buddhist Church.

Rev. Hata was a student of Rev. Haya Akegarasu, whom he met in Japan. Rev. Akegarasu had a profound influence on Rev. Hata, giving him an entirely new understanding of Buddhism that colored his teachings at the Oakland Church and caused an uproar with the Board. The Board accused Rev. Hata of being a person with wrong views, or "Iyanjin".

At the same time, Masao Kubose was getting more actively involved in the church and Buddhism, organizing a popular young people's group and becoming the President of the local chapter of the Young Buddhist Association of Northern California. Rev. Hata was ultimately dismissed from the church, and he started a new group called Kyudoshu Mission (Seeker of the Way), which was supported by Masao. Masao Kubose was critical of the current state of Buddhist churches and teachings in America and resigned from the Buddhist Churches of America, even though he had been quite active.

Kubose's interest in Buddhism and Eastern Philosophy was kindled, so he went on to further his education. In 1929, the then 24 year-old Masao was asked to serve as Rev. Akegarasu's personal secretary during Akegarasu's tour of the United States. After that tour, he was invited by Rev. Akegarasu to study at his temple in Japan. After graduating with a major in Philosophy, Kubose travelled to Japan in 1936 with his new wife, Minnie. Masao and Minnie lived at Rev. Akegarasu's temple, where Masao was given the Dharma name, "Gyomei", meaning "Bright Dawn." He later changed the spelling to "Gyomay" to make it easier for Americans to pronounce.



With Rev. Akegarasu at Mt. Vernon in 1929



Rev. Gyomay Kubose's Ordination 1936

With the tension of the pending war building in Japan, they and other Americans were advised to leave for the U.S., catching the next-to-last boat on July 4, 1941. They lived with Minnie's parents in California with their two sons, Don and Sunnan, until April 1942, when they were ordered to an internment camp, along with 120,000 other Japanese Americans.

They remained at the camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming for two years, then Rev. Gyomay Kubose relocated to Chicago, where he established the Buddhist Temple of Chicago. In 1966, Rev. Kubose flew to Japan for three more years of studies in Buddhism at Otani University. Before heading back home, he traveled extensively, visiting historical Buddhist sites in India, the Buddhist Conference in Malaysia and Europe.

When at the temple, Rev. Kubose wore street clothes and added only a ceremonial belt, robe and prayer beads as required by the specific ritual. His simple attitude and mild manners often belied his knowledge and experiences, and his great calling to spread the teachings and help others.



Rev. Gyomay Kubose and Dharma Ears - 1997

The key to those teachings is best illustrated by what he wrote in his booklet, *American Buddhism: A New Direction*, first presented in 1965 at the Eastern Young Buddhists League Conference. He wrote:

“Regardless of its intrinsic value, the only real value of Buddhism for the individual is determined by how one understands and lives it.... There is a living Buddhism and a dead Buddhism. Dead Buddhism is the mere knowledge of Buddhism. Living Buddhism is that which is understood by the whole body, not just the head or heart, and is lived by the person.”

This philosophy, living, and teaching style is like a lineage imprint, from Honen, to Shinran Shonin, and down through the Higashi Honganji sect, producing many influential thinkers, including Bright Dawn transmission lineage teachers, Rev. Manshi Kiyozawa and Rev. Haya Akegarasu. Rev. Akegarasu, a student of Rev. Kiyozawa, was the successor to Kiyozawa’s revival movement and he advocated his teachings throughout Japan.

The highlight of those teachings have a strong lineage resemblance to the philosophy and methods taught by Rev. Gyomay Kubose and continued in the teachings of Rev. Koyo Kubose and Bright Dawn Center. As noted by Gyokyo T. Saito, who translated the now out-of-print book, *Shout of Buddha: Writings of Haya Akegarasu*:

“In looking at Reverend Kiyozawa and Reverend Akegarasu the fact to notice is that they abandoned the thousand-year-old Buddhist terminology and used ordinary words

to manifest Buddhism. In order to do that, they had to translate the teaching with their own flesh and blood.”

When asked what key teaching of Rev. Akegarasu most influenced Rev. Gyomay Kubose, Rev. Koyo Kubose said it was non-dualism. He said that The Way of Oneness that his father emphasized stressed the non-dualistic teachings, especially as contrasted to the traditional Jodo Shinshu environment. As Rev. Koyo Kubose explains, Amida is often viewed in a dualistic way, but when Rev. Gyomay Kubose spoke of Amida, he would use the non-dual term “universal life” as a synonym. Rev. Koyo Kubose said his father’s koan was “just live life.” When he autographed his books, he would write “Naturalness”, “Suchness” or “Oneness.”

Rev. and Mrs. Arthur Takemoto wrote in a tribute to Rev. Gyomay Kubose, in the book, *Remembering Sensei*:

“Sensei was an innovator ... It took a great deal of gumption and fortitude in trying to open the eyes of the then Japanese American public to a broader scope of understanding of Jodi Shinshu in America. Going beyond a closed and narrow, medieval concept of Jodo Shinshu, he ventured to bring Jodo Shinshu as it should be practiced and understood which Shinran Shonin himself advocated in the Kyo Gyo Shinsho—that he wanted to clarify the teaching of Honen at the same time follow the Dharma as taught by Buddha Shakamuni.”

Asked if Rev. Koyo Kubose practiced the Nembutsu, he replied that his sense of Nembutsu is “to think about the Buddha” and that “nem” is the core of mindfulness. He emphasized that when something becomes a ritual, it becomes commonplace and essentially dead, robbing the personal impact from people.

When asked what sutra or sutras most influenced Rev. Gyomay Kubose and Rev. Koyo Kubose, he said his father’s favorite sutra was the *Tan Butsu Ge*, and Rev. Koyo Kubose said he was most influenced by *The Heart of the Great Wisdom Paramita Sutra*. But, he added that he “wonders about the notion of sutras themselves” regarding their form and chanting. Most are rooted in history and then become central to a particular denomination.

When it comes to The Bright Dawn Center of Oneness Buddhism, he mentions that since we’re just starting our own legacy and tradition, our niche sutras will be the writings of Rev. Gyomay Kubose and the main goal of Bright Dawn is to keep our central “sutras” in Rev. Gyomay Kubose’s writings available, keep his actual voice alive in the Dial the Dharma talks, and support the core Lay Ministry program to spread the teachings.

Rev. Koyo believes the Lay Ministry program is core to Bright Dawn’s mission and he has been surprised at how it has evolved into natural sanghas developing among each class and among the Lay Ministers as a whole. The sense of togetherness and sharing of the Lay Ministers individual spiritual journeys, in a “mutual polishing” atmosphere, is

something he thinks offers the most value and is a demonstration of what living Buddhism is all about. It is very much a “real life” approach, not an intellectual approach to Buddhism.

The Lay Ministry program was established in 2006, and since that time it has trained and induced 28 Lay Ministers, with six more to be inducted in the summer of 2014. Currently, there are three Lay Minister candidates participating in the program that began in 2013, who will be inducted in 2016.

The Lay Ministry Program offers an important option to the type of religious training that prepares someone to function in traditional professional ministerial role, meeting the needs of today’s increasingly secular world. The program endorses the concept of lay spiritual teachers, instead of a sharply defined dichotomy between lay and clergy, encouraging lay people to provide religious teachings and practices rather than just be passive consumers or receivers.

Currently, it is a three-year program consisting of three phases, introducing the Way of Oneness during a four-month period, 15 months of coursework about Buddhism, and a 12-month practicum of formulating individual Action Plans with the goal of developing a continually evolving daily practice and being able to see the Dharma teachings in all aspects of one's life.

The program concludes with participants attending a Lay Ministry Induction Ceremony at the Bright Dawn Center in Coarsegold, California.



Striking the Calling Block – Induction May 2010



Post-Induction Fun - May 2013

Inducted Lay Ministers are active in their local communities, establishing independent sanghas, contributing to other Buddhist and religious groups as guest speakers and Dharma teachers, working in prison ministries, functioning as Lay Ministry training program facilitators and co-facilitators, hosting or presenting Dharma Glimpses on

Bright Dawn's Live Dharma Sunday BlogTalk radio show on Sunday morning at 8AM PST / 11AM EST, and serving as spiritual resources and friends to a wider community through Bright Dawn Sangha Ning site discussion groups and forums.

This living, real life Buddhism of the Bright Dawn Center of Oneness Buddhism can be found in many teachings on our websites, publications, and YouTube videos including:

“Oneness Formula” by Rev. Koyo Kubose

U = 2I + 2A = E

U = Right Understanding

2I's = Impermanence and Interdependency

2A's = Acceptance and Appreciation

E = Enlightened Living

The Way of Oneness formula is intended to be universal. Although the formula comes out of a general Buddhist perspective, it is expressed in a way that hopefully makes it accessible to Buddhists of any sect, to followers of other religions, or even to those with no particular religious orientation. To remember the teachings means to live them in one's everyday life. This is the most important thing.

Another example is the YES (Your Everyday Spirituality) feature in every issue of *Oneness*, the quarterly newsletter of the Bright Dawn Center of Oneness Buddhism. For example, this practice for June:

The theme is calmness, with the purpose of dealing with stress. The method is to do a “Breathing-in Gassho:” With arms apart and palms facing each other, bring palms together while taking a big inhale; then hold your breath for awhile before exhaling. It is a known paramedic fact that when having trouble catching your breath due to stress, holding your breath helps restore getting your breath back.

All of these resources for everyday spiritual development are available because of the work of the Bright Dawn organization. When Rev. Gyomay Kubose was 92, his son, Rev. Koyo Kubose realized what a tragedy it would be, if after a lifetime dedicated to promoting Buddhism in America, his father's great contributions would be lost. And with

that, the Kubose Dharma Legacy was established in 1998 to ensure the continuity of Rev. Kubose's lifework. At the same time, Rev. Gyomay Kubose transmitted his spiritual authority to his son, Rev. Koyo Sunnan Kubose.

The Kubose Dharma Legacy became the Bright Dawn Institute for American Buddhism in 2008, then the Bright Dawn Center of Oneness Buddhism in 2011. It supports a broad range of organizational and publication projects, under the spiritual direction of Rev. Koyo Kubose and leadership of the Board of Directors. It manages reprinting of Rev. Gyomay Kubose's books, publishing and distributing its free quarterly newsletter, *Oneness*, and more, including current planning for a future Dharma center in Coarsegold, California.



Transmission to Rev. Koyo Sunnan Kubose

The everyday Dharma teachings of Rev. Gyomay and Rev. Koyo Kubose are reaching a wide international audience of spiritual seekers through the organizational website, brightdawn.org, and the social Ning site, brightdawnsangha.ning.com. Rev. Gyomay Kubose and Rev. Koyo Kubose's books, articles, videos, practice and ritual resources, can be found through links on both sites.