



## ~ The 6<sup>th</sup> General Meeting of ILAB ~

The International Ladies Association of Buddhism held its 6th general meeting on November 2011. At this general meeting, we had the precious chance to learn about the religious life of Buddhist women in Thailand in a talk given by Madam Futrakul, wife of the Thai Ambassador to Japan. Besides, we experienced chanting shomyo (Buddhist hymns), which is also said to be the origin of ancient Japanese music, of the Tendai denomination and the Pureland or Jodo denomination style.

### Opening Speech:

In her opening speech, Chairperson Ms Rinko Okano expressed her thankfulness to Madam Futrakul for being the guest speaker of the meeting. She also expressed her deep sympathy for the Thai people who were suffering from the devastating flood disaster in November. At the meeting, a golden image of the Buddha which was given by the President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, Mr. Phan Wannamethee, to Kodosan on a special occasion some years ago, was enshrined on the altar. Ms Okano emphasized the importance for Buddhist women to learn and practice the fundamental teachings of Buddhism to transcend differences between the races and religions amongst the rapidly expanding population in the world.

### Ceremony session and Shomyo:



Next, we moved to the ceremony session and shomyo (Buddhist hymns) practice. The shomyo we experienced was rather "unusual" because it was literally a collaboration of the Tendai Buddhism style and the Pureland or Jodo or Buddhism style.

This, again, is a distinct feature of ILAB which inspires to accept and offer diversity in Buddhism



Firstly, Reverend Midorikawa explained about the characteristics of Tendai shomyo. She said that shomyo is considered as the source of Indian classical music, and it belongs to the oldest music traditions along with Gregorian chants etc. The beginning of Tendai shomyo, called Sambo Sorai, captures the essence of Homage to the Triple Gems, which is paying respect to the Buddha, his teachings and the Buddhist community. The hymn ends with a beautiful melody called Gobai, which lyrically describes the ideal of Buddhism to keep our mind clear and pure despite living in a world of confusion such as the lotus floating on a muddy pond.

Then, Reverend Hibino described about the features of Pureland shomyo, which is a sutra to praise the Amiddha Buddha, the Bodhisattva of Mercy and the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. When we call the name of the Amiddha Buddha, the Buddha will bestow enormous light and long life on us; if we call the name of the Bodhisattva of Mercy, the

Bodhisattva will hold us with compassion; when we call the name of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, we will be given true wisdom. Furthermore, at this occasion, we had to chant shomyo while doing walking meditation and offering lotus petals to the Buddha image.

Every participant was so excited about their first experience of holding the flower basket (a metal dish-shaped "basket" with lacy patterns and strings attached to it) and chanting shomyo while walking and meditating!

### **Talk by Madame Aumaporn, wife of the Ambassador of Thailand**



After *Shomyo*, we had the honor to listen to a talk given by our special guest, Madam Futrakul, on the religious life of Buddhist women in Thailand. Madam graduated from Chulalongkorn University and furthered her studies at Kasetsart University in Thailand and Concordia University in Canada before starting her career with the World Trade Organization. She was also Director of International Cooperation Division in at the Ministry of Commerce before she came to Japan. Here is a brief summary of her talk

“It is my pleasure to give you a talk about “religious life of Buddhist women in Thailand”. In Thailand, about 98% of people are Buddhist. For us, it is more a way of life because we do not see the Buddha as a God but rather as a real person who reached enlightenment through meditation and leading a good life. When we pray or pay respect to his image, we are promising him that we will do our best to be good.

I grew up in a devout Buddhist family and my grandmother taught me to pray in Pali and Sanskrit. We had to get up very early in the morning to offer food to the monks. We usually go to the temple on important days like our birthday and Buddhist Holy Day.

Buddhist worship is a way to bring peace to your mind. In Thailand every family has a praying corner or an altar that is located on the top floor of the house. Practising Buddhists usually worship twice a day; in the morning and at night, bowing down in front of the altar before the chants begin.

In Thailand, Buddhist Holy Days take place four times throughout a lunar cycle, on the new moon, half-moon, full moon and half-moon again. The full moon is the most important Buddhist Holy Day, and monks normally shave their heads in the evening before that day. During major Buddhist Days that double as important religious festivals, the sale of alcohol is prohibited. Many people make a point of going to temple, which is a Theravada Buddhist tradition observed across the region in Thailand. We offer food and other things to the monks, and the monks give us blessing and chanting, followed by a sermon by a monk representative. We may have 5-10 minutes meditation, and sometimes we would be given the sacred water before we left the temple.

Among many traditions of the Thai people, freeing fish and birds is a very old one which has been practiced from time immemorial. Thai people who are devout Buddhists usually free fishes and birds on their birthdays or when they are seriously ill, as they believe that this meritorious act will prolong their lives.”

Madam Futrakul’s inspiring talk and her devotion to Buddhism enthralled and stimulated the audience to be more aware of their way of living as a Buddhist. After her talk, we enjoyed Madam’s company in a more relaxing atmosphere during tea time and had pleasant conversation with fellow members and guests.

## ~ Outing to historical Zen temple “Engakuji Temple” in Kamakura ~



On October 15th 2011, ILAB organized its autumnal outing to the elegant ancient cultural city of Kamakura in the Kanagawa Prefecture. 29 members and guests participated in this outing despite of the rather cloudy weather, but nonetheless we were cheerful and excited about this excursion.

The outing kicked off with a delicious and beautiful lunch at a traditional “hanpen” or fish paste specialty restaurant which is well-known in the area. Ms Rinko Okano, Chairperson of ILAB, greeted all participants by expressing her gratitude toward their enthusiasm and explaining that ILAB activities aim to provide a chance for anyone to experience Japanese culture which is deeply related to Buddhism.

The highlight of our excursion is to visit the renowned Zen temple Engakuji Temple which was established in 1282 by Zen Master Mugaku-sogen. The temple belongs to the Rinzai school of Zen in Japanese Buddhism. The temple had always been an important religious establishment for the shogunate during both Kamakura and Edo periods. From Meiji period, it has become a momentous Zen training center attended by many significant Buddhist monks and scholars etc.

We had the honor to be received by the venerable Reverend Yokota, chief abbot of the temple, upon

our arrival. The Reverend himself showed us around the temple grounds and explained about the important buildings and the way Zen monks live and practice there. Furthermore, we had a special chance to visit the Shariden (a building enshrining the Buddha’s relics) which is also designated as a “National Treasure” and the Training Hall which are usually prohibited to the public.



After we paid respect to the Shariden, we went to a special meditation hall where Reverend Yokota taught us Zen meditation. With clear guidance illustrated by metaphorical expressions, we naturally learnt how to sit and regulate our breathing while meditating, in the beautiful setting of

a historical city surrounded by rich nature. We could hear the sounds of the wind, the leaves and the birds, which was such a relaxing experience for all participants including an elementary school student!



When the meditation session finished, the Reverend gave us a talk, saying that “the fundamental teachings of Buddhism come down to the idea that all living things have the same mind as

the Buddha, called ‘Buddha nature’. We often fail to see this Buddha nature within, because we are overwhelmed by the world of suffering. But when we sit quietly, we will feel that we are part of nature and part of the big universe, and will ultimately wake up to the Buddha nature in us.”

At the end of our tour, we enjoyed tea with the Reverend. ILAB’s board member, Reverend Hibino of Kayadera temple, made a short speech thanking Reverend Yokota and the staff of Engakuji temple for their warm hospitality. All in all, it was a fruitful outing which provided us an exceptional chance to experience genuine tranquility in Zen Buddhism.

## ~ ST Group ~

Since year 2011, ILAB started ST Group (Study Training Group) every two months. ST Group is opportunity to lean and experience Buddhism teachings and culture more intensively with small number of people in a casual atmosphere. ST Group is mainly targeted to the members, but we welcome guests, too.

- **Sep 4<sup>h</sup>, 2011, 14:00 -12:00 at Kodosan temple**
  - Prayer of Heart sutra and homage to triple gems
  - Short meditation
  - **Explanation & practice of Shomyo**
  - Report of Buddhist workshop in India

*Shyomo* is a Buddhism chanting which recites Buddhist scriptures with beautiful tunes. This time, shomyo was guided by Rev. Hibino and Rev. Kikuchi from Jodo-sect, and Rev. Midorikawa from Tendai-sect. It was a collaboration of two traditions. While we chant relics of praising Bodhisattvas, we throw flower petals (made with paper) as offering to them. For most of participants, it was the first experience to perform shomyo, but beautiful harmony was created.





- **Jan14<sup>th</sup>, 2012, 14:00-16:00 at Kayadera temple**
  - Prayer of Heart Sutra and homage to the triple gem
  - Read a passage from “Teaching of Buddha.
  - **Shomyo chanting**
  - **Report of “Global Buddhism Congregation 2011”**in India.



The first ST in 2012 started from Kayadera temple. After prayers, we practiced *Syomyo* chanting in the main hall of the temple. It was Shomyo collaborated. Later part of the program was a report from Global Buddhist Congregation 2011, which was held in New Delhi in India from Nov.27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011. This conference was 2600th anniversary of Buddha’s enlightenment. About 900 people including high priests, monks, scholars, Ministers, politicians and lay Buddhists were invited from all over the world. The aim of the conference was to examine both capacity and the resilience of Buddhism to engage with the most pressing concerns of the modern world. Over two days of Plenary Sessions, they discussed about the following themes intensively.



by Jodo and Tendai sects. Recitation of Shomyo creates clean and bright atmosphere around us, and it naturally made our mind clear and calm.

1. Ethics and values / 2. Conflict and violence / 3. Politics and society / 4. Anxiety, depression and alienation / 5. Environmental crisis / 6. Science and technology / 7. Livelihood and development / 8. Preservation and development of Buddhism

From ILAB, Rev. Ikuko Hibino, Rev. Myosei Midorikawa, Ms. Kiyoko Suzuki were invited. Rev. Midorikawa made a speech “Female Buddhists in Japan—present& future vision”, in “Women and Buddhism” symposium. She introduced uniqueness of Japanese Buddhism and position of women in the Buddhist world in Japan. Her speech was quite well accepted by the audience. Some people said that their longtime questions about Japanese Buddhism were clarified by her speech.

It was a meaningful experience for the three delegates from ILAB, because they could encounter with people from different Buddhist traditions and cultures directly. Hearing speeches of worlds’ top

scholars and high lamas gave them new insight. In addition to it, communications with other delegates from Japan who will be the next leaders of Japan's

Buddhist world were precious opportunities for them.

## ~ Announcements~

### ★ Next ST Group

**Date: March 10<sup>th</sup> (Sat) 14:00 – 16:00 / Place: Kodosan Temple (Yokohama)**

**Fee: Regular members Free / Associate members and guests ¥500-**

**Special Program of this time is:**

- Demonstration casual tea ceremony on table.
- Exhibition and explanation of tea ceremony utensils
- One-point seminar of English presentation

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### ★ You are welcome to ILAB membership

We have three types of memberships: Regular membership and Student membership for Buddhists, and Associate membership for non-Buddhists. We sincerely welcome your application.

※For more details, please see the application guideline.

### What is International Ladies Association of Buddhism, or ILAB?

ILAB aims at offering opportunities for females to meet and exchange their views, to learn and practice Buddha's teachings regardless of denominations and nationalities. It also aims to educate and support young female Buddhist students/academics. ILAB Chairperson is Ms. Rinko Okano (Vice President, *Kodo Kyodan*), and Board Directors are Ms. Ann Sado (Executive Director of social enterprises), Rev. Ikuko Hibino (Head Priestess of *Kayadera Temple/Jodo* denomination), Ms. Hiroko Maruyama (Lecturer/ Waseda School of Environment), Rev. Myosei Midorikawa (Nun/Tendai denomination), Ms. Karen Okano (Wife of President of *Kodo Kyodan*), Ms. Alberte Rabiller (Teacher/International school), Ms. Jayanti Minato (translator). ILAB is a part of the activities organized by International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC), an independent academic organ of Kodo Kyodan. Program includes meditation, talk, introductions of Buddhist culture and rituals, debate, workshops, and contests, etc. At the moment, we are conducting two general meetings a year, as well as occasional outings and visits to Buddhist temples and sites. Our activities will be conducted mainly in English with Japanese translation when necessary.

(*Padmasri* is the name of ILAB's newsletter; it is a Sanskrit name meaning 'Divine Lotus'.)



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