



International Ladies Association of Buddhism

Padmasri

"The divine lotus"

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Beyond differences, there bloom the flowers of wisdom and harmony



❁ *Buddhist ceremony at the commencement of the 7th General Meeting-praying in front of the golden Buddha statue presented by World Fellowship of Buddhists President Mr Wannamathee at the inauguration of ILAB in 2009*

ILAB 7th General Meeting

At the annual general meetings, special guests are invited to talk about Buddhism and Buddhist culture

On November 25th 2012, the International Ladies Association of Buddhism held its 7th general meeting at Kodosan temple, Yokohama. In the first half of the program, we had the precious opportunity to learn about Soto Zen meditation with Reverend Issho Fujita, Director of Soto Zen Buddhism International Center.

Talk by Reverend Fujita

Reverend Fujita is a Soto school priest and he studied educational psychology at Tokyo University. He is renowned for his work in teaching Soto Zen Buddhism and practicing in Zen centers worldwide. He was sent to be a resident teacher at Pioneer Valley Zendo in Massachusetts in 1987. During his stay until 2005, he also taught at Smith College, Amherst College, Mt. Holyoke College, Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, and other colleges and institutions. In 2010, he was assigned to be Director of the Soto Zen Buddhism International Center in San Francisco. Reverend Fujita is interested in inventing new and fun ways to articulate the depth of the simple practice of *shikantaza* (just sitting).



Rev Fujita explaining about zazen and posture

“Learning from infants”

At this meeting, he let us know about the essence of “zazen” in a lively and humorous talk and demonstration in both English and Japanese. He said in order to practice zazen effectively, we should learn from the way how infants sit. Usually, we start learning zazen by imitating the Zen masters, like how to cross the legs, how to close the mouth and how to adjust the eyesight etc. However this kind of approach often ruins the quality of zazen. If we look at an infant, we can see that he or she can sit beautifully even without being taught or told.

Furthermore, in the Soto tradition, zazen is not “meditation”, thus the term “meditation” is not used to describe the practice. When we hear the word “meditation”, we often relate it to a special state of mind, or as a method to achieve enlightenment. We may also focus on and have deep insight into our inner world during meditation. Yet, this kind of preoccupied concept about meditation misses the real point of zazen.

According to Master Dogen, who founded the Soto school of Zen Buddhism in Japan in the 13th century, described zazen as “a way to spend your time sitting upright with nothing to be gained and nothing to be realized in the way as the ancestral teachers did” (ancestral teachers referring to the buddhas in the past). Therefore, zazen is not aimed at attaining something, such as enlightenment; rather, we should do zazen for the sake of zazen.

If we can let go of our mind and body during zazen and cast them into the house of Buddha, even without applying effort or expanding our mind, we can part from birth and death and become Buddha. To reach this state, we should be natural, flexible and



Participants listen attentively to the lively talk

spontaneous from the inside, instead of controlling our body and mind from the outside. Zazen has to be done in accord and agreement with the body and mind, not to be imposed on ourselves with our ego. Master Dogen pointed out the importance of implementing spontaneous action (云為 un-i) instead of forceful action (強為 gou-i) during the practice of zazen. So, zazen should be enjoyable.

“Tips to do zazen”

So, what are some tips to maintain a comfortable posture that helps us to be natural and flexible during zazen? Reverend Fujita gave us the following guidelines on how to practice zazen in relaxation:

- When we are sitting, the “sit bones” in our pelvis support our body weight. Feel the shape of your sit bones by tilting the pelvis backward and forward. Find the middle point where the body weight falls naturally & vertically. Good alignment with gravity results in deep relaxation and resilience.
- Do not worry about whether your mouth, your eyes etc are open or close.
- Breath is subtle, deep and spreading through whole body. We should feel our breath, not “think” about it. Gradually, zazen will help us feel what is happening now, instead of thinking and worrying about what happened in the past or is going to happen in the future, i.e. to shift from “thinking mode” to “feeling mode”.
- We can regard our arms and legs as “branches”. It is our body- the “trunk” which is most important because it contains many internal organs that sustain our lives: heart, lungs, stomach, intestines etc. Zazen also means to offer life back to nature and makes us aware that our life is supported by everything around us.
- Mind is a natural flow like the big sky with floating clouds. Thoughts freely appear and disappear, and our heart opens to the phenomenon inside and outside us.

After the talk, all participants practiced zazen together with Reverend Fujita’s guidance.

Urasenke tea ceremony

With our minds refreshed in zazen, we then moved on to the second part of the program- a demonstration of urasenke tea ceremony by Mr Kiyotaka Maruyama, student of Seijo University. We watched the beautiful ceremony which is full of elegance and serenity. Then, Reverend Ikuko Hibino (ILAB Board Director) explained about omotesenke tea ceremony style, a style that is commonly practiced in the Buddhist world. Finally, each participant enjoyed a bowl of green tea and looked at the tea room and utensils.



Mr Maruyama made an artistic demonstration of urasenke tea ceremony



Tea ceremony is also interactive as guests ask about the theme of the ceremony

Study & Training Groups

Study and Training Groups (ST) are held once every two months to enhance our knowledge in Buddhism, experience Buddhist culture in daily life, and exchange views

January 13th 2013

Appreciation of Incense with Ms Eriyo Watanabe



Ms Watanabe talks about incense as art and culture

Ms Eriyo Watanabe established the Center for Arts and Wellness in 2003, teaching Japanese incense ceremony in a contemporary style. She has created various unique workshops combining several Japanese art forms, not only incense ceremony but also tea ceremony and calligraphy and Japanese traditional performing arts such as Bunraku and Noh, for

creative release and relaxation. In 2011, the Incense Research Institute (IRI) was set up. The Japanese Culture Programs and Stress Management Programs are especially popular.

Ms Watanabe grew up in Japan and lived in London, Paris, Hong Kong and Boston for ten years. Moreover, she has traveled to over 45 countries in the world to explore the different cultures, so she actively interweaves her experiences based on her multi-cultural background in her work.

At this meeting, Ms Watanabe facilitated a workshop called “Listening to Incense” (*Mon-koh*). First she explained about the history of incense, that incense has a long history as it has always been an important part in religious ceremonies. The incense used in ancient Japanese Buddhist rites composed of a mixture of aromatic materials, often brought in from China via the Korean peninsula. From the late Nara period throughout Heian period, incense had been enjoyed by aristocrats for scenting a room or garment like kimono. During the Kamakura period, high-ranking samurai used to scent their helmet and armor as a means of purification before going to the battlefield.

Thus, the art of appreciating incense, *Koh-doh* (incense ceremony), is regarded as one of Japan’s Three Arts, along with tea ceremony and flower arrangement. In contemporary life, people enjoy incense through different kinds of products, and Japanese incense ceremony is also introduced to many countries across the world.



The different utensils in incense ceremony

Ms Watanabe went on to elaborate about the practice of *Mon-koh*, which literally means “listening to incense”. The idea of listening to incense may originate in Buddhism, she said, as there is a description in Mahayana Buddhist scripture of a Buddha-world “*Shukohkoku*” in which everything is fragrant like incense, and the Buddha teaches with fragrance instead of words. *Mon-koh* helps us to develop the ability to pay mindful attention to fragrance. It is not only a very special incense experience but can also be a tranquil, meditative ritual to relax us in everyday life.

All our five senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch become active through *Mon-koh*, so it brings peace of mind and enhances the blood circulation in the body. When doing *Mon-koh* alone, it has the effects of a deep meditation; in a group session, participants share one incense cup, thus producing a sense of unity.



After Ms Watanabe's talk, the participants enjoyed a group session of *Mon-koh* and shared a moment of tranquility in the relaxing atmosphere of precious fragrances.

Participants appreciating the fragrance of incense



March 3rd 2013

History on Japanese Buddhism

Buddhism has been practiced in Japan since at least the Asuka period in the 6th century and the first spreading of the religion being transported from China can be traced back to the 3rd century. Buddhism is a major influence in Japanese culture and nowadays, it is said there are around 75,000 Buddhist temples in Japan with 9.6 million people claiming to be believers. At the same time, one of the main characteristics of Japanese Buddhism is the diversity of Buddhist schools or denominations. At this Study and Training Group, Reverend Ikuko Hibino and Ms Ann Sado (ILAB Board Director) explained to us the aspects of these different schools.



"Buddhist Denominations and schools in Japan"

Rev Hibino and Ms Sado gave explanation in Japanese and English

In general there are 13 schools and 56 subsects in Japanese Buddhism.

Buddhism was first introduced to Japan in 538 AD. Prince Regent Shotoku (574-622) established the Constitution of 17 Articles to promote the noble spiritual values and respect for Buddhism. Empress Suiko (554-628) also openly encouraged the acceptance of Buddhism among all Japanese people.

After that, six schools began in Japan in the Asuka and Nara periods. The six schools are *Sanron, Hosso, Jojitsu, Kussha, Ritsu and Kegon*. During this time, the Buddhist priests concentrated on the philosophy and institution rather than practice of Buddhism.

In the late Nara period, Esoteric Buddhism was introduced to Japan, and 2 major Buddhist denominations Tendai and Shingon schools were founded by Saicho and Kukai respectively.

After a couple of centuries, the Jodo (Pure Land) schools of Buddhism became very popular. The object of worship is the Amida Buddha and common practice is reciting the name of Amida Buddha (nembutsu). *Yuzu-nembutsu-shu* was started by Ryonin, *Jodo-shu* founded by Honen, *Jodo Shin-shu* was established by Shinran, and *Ji-shu* was established by Ippen.

Soon after that, Zen practice was brought to Japan and Zen Buddhism flourished. Their object of worship is Shakyamuni Buddha. The main schools are: *Rinzai-shu*, started by Eizai, *Soto-shu* by Dogen, and *Obaku-shu* founded by Ingen.

Another important school was Nichiren-shu was founded by Nichiren.



Vivid pictures and slideshow help participants to understand the complicated history of Buddhism in Japan

Demonstration of sari

Ms Jayanti Minato is from Nepal and has lived in Japan for many years. She is also a Board Director of ILAB. Ms Minato talked about the saree, which is common attire from Nepal. It is believed that the saree was already worn by people, since about 2600 years ago when Buddha was born in Nepal. It is a common costume in South Asia like in Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, etc.



Different sarees were shown

Sarees of different materials are worn for different purposes & occasions. Saree is made from many kinds of colorful materials such as Silk, Cotton, Synthetic fibers, etc. For example, on special occasions, they wear beautiful, heavy silk or embroidered sarees.



Ms Jayanti Minato

She explained the connection between Buddhism and sarees with some pictures. When Lord Buddha revealed his right shoulder, it was considered that he was showing respect for his disciples while communicating. For some Buddha statues, you may have

noticed that he covered both his shoulders. That means he was preaching or giving a mass sermon to his followers. It is believed that the way of wearing sarees nowadays bear the same significance and connection since the Buddha's era.

We also wear sarees showing our right shoulder while we communicate during social activities, and we cover both shoulders while visiting holy shrines or performing religious activities. In certain South Asian cultures they even cover their heads to show more respects to their elders.

Ms Minato presented several slides that showed many different styles and colors of sarees, red pink, blue, with robes etc. In the following slides, she explained how people wear the different sarees. On wedding day, the Nepalese bride wears red saree with green beaded necklace call *pote* and red bangles call *chura*.

Teej festival: Teej festival is only for women like *hina matsuri* in Japan. Women pray to God hoping for good husbands and for good health and prosperity. This Lady has green *pote* (glass beads) and red *chura* (bangles) which indicates she is a married woman.

At the end of the presentation, Ms. Minato demonstrated how to wear a saree. Many participants tried on the saree and enjoyed the different cultural experience.



Ms Minato helped participants to put on the saree. Namaste!

June 2nd 2013

Japanese classical dancing stage performance by 5-year-old Ellen Okano

The “theme” for this Study and Training Group is “Japanese classical dancing as a traditional art in Japanese culture” and Ellen Okano (5) set the tone for the meeting with her first stage performance. Ellen Okano is the granddaughter of Ms Rinko Okano, chairperson of ILAB, and has been learning Japanese classical dancing under her



Ellen Okano's (5) debut performance

dance master Tokuya Azuma, 6th generation head of Azuma school of Japanese classical dancing, since the age of 2. The title of her dance, “*Fuji-no-hana*”, literally meaning the wisteria, is a traditional Japanese short ballad (*kouta*) which describes the beautiful sceneries in spring. Ellen danced calmly and elegantly in her pink kimono in front of an audience of about 30 people and said

she enjoyed the performance very much.

Azuma school head Ms Tokuya Azuma, who also attended the meeting, later greeted the audience together with Ellen on the stage.

Talk on Japanese classical dancing “Do you know who started the Nenbustu Dancing at the origin of Japanese classical dance in the Kabuki style?”by Ms Ann Sado

In her talk, Ms Ann Sado explained to us about the relation between *Nenbutsu odori* and Kabuki dance. Japanese classical dance in the Kabuki style which is now mainly performed by male actors was actually started by a woman called Okuni about 500 years ago. The first type of dance performed by Okuni was called *nenbutsu odori*, a religious dance chanting invocations of Amida Buddha. This dance was revived as a means of praying for the souls who had died in the civil wars at Obon or “Festival of the Dead” during the medieval times.



Ms Ann Sado

After the Tokugawa Shogunate was established, peace and unity was imposed on the nation, and “*nenbutsu odori*” became even more popular. Gradually, the common people began to enjoy and even added characteristics like fancy costumes including lavish dresses worn by the Portuguese traders, decorations and props. This new style of “*nenbustu odori*” became known as “*furyu*” or “*embellished dance*”. As the word “*kabuku*” indicates extravagant customs or behavior that departs from traditional or conventional norm, this new style of dance evolved into “Kabuki”, the classic stage performance by male actors and female impersonators.

The lively “*nenbustu odori*” was enjoyed all people of all ages, and even monks! In this period, Japanese culture was truly diverse and inclusive. Portuguese words such as

“castella” sweets, “tempura” dish, “tobacco” became part of the Japanese vocabulary.

Okuni remained as a fashion icon and great inspiration to the dance culture in early Edo Japan. She successfully included popular folk dances in her “nenbustu odori” and also imitated the behavior of kabuki-mono of her day. It grew into “kabuki odori” which is a sort of “musical entertainment”. However, due to a call for moral reform, the Tokugawa Shogunate banned all women from appearing on the stage in 1629. Therefore, though Okuni had been the originator of “nenbutsu odori” which was part of the fundamental base of Kabuki, this Japanese Classical Dance is now a theater art form performed by only men on stage nowadays.

Ms Sado’s dynamic talk definitely gave us a deeper insight into Japanese Classical Dance culture which is a valuable traditional performing art appreciated by people worldwide today.

~ Announcements ~

★ We welcome you to ILAB membership.

We have three types of memberships: Regular membership and Student membership for Buddhist people, and Associate membership for non-Buddhist people. 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 Rev. Myosei Midorikawa (Nun/Tendai denomination), Rev. Ikuko Hibino (Head Priestess of Kayadera Temple/Jodo denomination), Rev. Yuken Kikuchi (Priestess/Jodo denomination), Ms. Ann Sado (Executive Director of social enterprises), Ms. Hiroko Maruyama (Lecturer/ Waseda School of Environment), Ms. Jayanti Minato (Translator), Ms. Alberte Rabiller (Teacher at an international school) and Ms. Karen Okano (Wife of President of Kodo Kyodan). Program includes meditation, talk, workshops, introduction of Buddhist culture and rituals etc. At the moment, we conduct annual general meetings, bi-monthly study & training groups, as well as outings and visits to Buddhist temples and sites. Our activities are conducted in both English and Japanese.



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