

HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE

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HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE | LOS ANGELES BETSUIN

TEMPLE SCHEDULE

OCTOBER

- 22 10:00am Sunday Service
- 29 10:00am Sunday Service
(Disc Group)
- 29 11:30am Dharma School
Halloween

NOVEMBER

- 5 *Daylight Savings Ends*
- 5 10:00am Kaikyo-ki/Shotsuki
Memorial Service
- 12 10:00am Sunday Service
- 19 10:00am Family Service
- 26 10:00am Sunday Service
Discussion Group

DECEMBER

- 3 10:00am Shotsuki Service
- 10 10:00am Bodhi Day/Year-end
Family Service
- 17 9:00am Temple Clean-up
- 29 9:00am Mochitsuki (Friday)
- 31 6:30pm Year-end Service
(Joya-e)

DHARMA SCHOOL

HALLOWEEN PARTY

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29

JOIN US FOR FOOD + FUN AFTER SERVICE

PLEASE RSVP!

**Kaikyo-ki/Shotsuki
Memorial Service**

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5

10:00AM

*DAYLIGHT SAVINGS ENDS

**MOCHITSUKI MOVED TO
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29 - 9:00AM**



The Way



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HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE • LOS ANGELES BETSUIN

Dharma Seeds Month

Rev. Peter Hata

About the Dharma Seeds

The last three Betsuin Sunday Services in August were auspicious. For the first time, the Betsuin's Dharma Seeds led the chanting of the Shoshinge and gave the English talks. Who are the Dharma Seeds? They are a group of lay Sangha members from the various Higashi temples in the North America District who are studying the dharma together in the Dharma Seeds educational program.

One of the purposes of the program is to provide lay leaders with a good foundation in the history, teaching, and rituals of Buddhism. But also, as is implicit in the word "seeds," this program encourages participants to share the dharma with others—as we know, Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes not only studying the dharma, but that the underlying reason to study is to benefit not only myself, but others as well.

There are two "generations" of Dharma Seeds. If you attended the Higashi World Dobo Gathering last August, you know that the Dharma Seeds were speakers and discussion group moderators, and that they also contributed to the videos that were shown. The group from the Betsuin included Greg Elliot, Kathy Ikeda, Wayne Itoga, and Steve Toyoshima. Then, earlier this year, we began an educational program for the "second generation" which currently includes Denis and Yoko Oyakawa, Ana Nakano-Sanchez, and Nicole Shrieves.

As part of their educational program, Rinban Ito and I decided to basically turn over to both generations not only the dharma messages for those three Sundays, but also the leading of the Shoshinge.

Dharma Seeds Lead the Chanting

All three chanting leaders—Wayne, Nicole, and Ana—did an excellent job

leading the Shoshinge. Wayne is, of course, a longtime member of the Otani Gakuen Choir and singing/chanting seems to come naturally to him. In addition, Wayne had received instruction in leading the Shoshinge from Rev. Hasegawa as part of the first generation's program. For Nicole and Ana, there were additional challenges. Not only is there the intimidating factor of the long tradition associated with the Shoshinge, but both have only been active at the temple for about 3 years—and neither had any previous exposure to Buddhist chanting. In addition, neither speaks Japanese. However, along with Denis and Yoko, they are active members of the Wednesday Night Study Class, and they diligently practiced shōmyō (Buddhist chanting) there.

Excerpts From Ana's talk

The speaker for the first of the three Sundays was Ana Nakano-Sanchez. In her opening, she stated, "First I want to say thank you to all of you for making me and my family feel so welcome at Higashi Honganji. We were a little apprehensive because we didn't know anyone else here or any of the traditions, but we were heartened by the warmth we felt from the Sangha."

Not having grown up in a Buddhist family, she described her path to Buddhism by saying, "It took until graduate school to discover Buddhism. I was in a multicultural counseling course and was introduced to basic Buddhist tenets, and I thought, 'This makes sense to me!' The concepts of suffering, imper-

manence, non-attachment—they made sense in my work as a counselor and in my personal life. I also read a book, *Buddha's Brain*, that connected practical neuroscience to Buddhist beliefs and practices, and I was convinced that I needed to learn more. It didn't happen right away, but I eventually found Rev. Peter's Introduction to Buddhism class in 2013."

Ana also spoke a little about her experiences in the Wednesday Night Study Class: "For a few years now, I've been attending the Wednesday Night Study Class. And it's still very overwhelming. Every time I learn something new it reminds me of how much more I don't know. We studied the *Larger Sutra* and honestly, to me it's very dense and intimidating...The story of Amida Buddha's 48 Vows to me seemed ornate and lengthy, and its verbiage was difficult for me to accept at first, but without the example of Amida I wouldn't be able to understand a concept with so much meaning. I would have missed so much of the beauty of Namu Amida Butsu. I learned that 'Namu' or bowing doesn't mean I worship Amida Buddha in the way I would worship a god; it's an expression of deep appreciation for what Amida represents—the desire for all beings to be enlightened and to accept and embrace that we are all interconnected and impermanent. That's an oversimplification, of course, but you can come to the WNSC to discuss that with us."

(Please see *DHARMA SEEDS*, page 3)



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<http://www.facebook.com/hhbt.la>



Betsuin News



Temple Clean Up

Cleaning the temple is a huge task, but with everyone's efforts we can make it sparkle in no time. It is a tradition for all of us to help bring a clean temple into the New Year. Our annual Temple Clean-up will be on Sunday, December 17th. Without the efforts of all of our members and friends, we could not complete this big task. Please join us as we clean our temple with pride and make it shine into 2018. Thank you in advance for all of your hard work.

MOCHITSUKI

Our annual Mochitsuki will be held on Friday, December 29th from 9:00am. This is one of the most exciting and enjoyable events of the year, but not without your help! Come out and help us make MOCHI for the altar and for our New Years Day ozoni. There will be plenty to eat here and take home. Be sure to invite your family and friends to enjoy this very special cultural year-end tradition. You never know what kind of fun and delicious mochi you'll be taking home this year!

Jr. YBA NEWS

Jr. YBL Conference in San Diego

During the past Labor Day weekend our Higashi Jr.YBA representatives had the great privilege of driving down to San Diego for the 2017 Southern District Jr. YBL Conference. The theme for this year's conference, co-hosted by Vista and San Diego, was "Finding a Path out of Chaos" in which we were taught that although bad things may happen here and there, you can always find a way out of your chaotic life. The workshops we participated in were very interactive and insightful. Aside from the time we spent at the temple, there was also a lot of time that wasn't spent there. Jr. YBAs from all over Southern District stayed in the Four Points by Sheraton where the banquet and social dance was held Saturday night (9/2). Southern District Conference 2017 was quite eventful for me, personally, not only because of the workshops, banquet, and dance, but because I had been installed into the new Southern District Jr.YBL Cabinet. My initiation along with my peers was very humorous as we walked around with goggles, inner tubes, and arm floaties all day. I had a great experience with Lindsay and Ami as well! They definitely made it more fun than any conference I have attended so far!! I'm very excited for this upcoming year and what it has in store!

Anita Komatsu



Our deepest condolences

to the family and relatives of ...

Mrs. Sachi Kawahira (84)
July 28, 2017

Mrs. Shizuye Tanouye (96)
August 5, 2017

Mrs. Shizuko Kunihiro (90)
August 20, 2017

Mr. Kenneth Makoto Ogawa (67)
August 21, 2017

Mrs. Fusako Kumamoto (92)
August 24, 2017

Mrs. Masako Hirota (92)
August 25, 2017

Mrs. Edna Tamiko Hashimoto (90)
September 7, 2017

Namu Amida Butsu

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She also spoke about the practical relevance of Buddhism to her work: "As a community college counselor, I've met with students from 14 years old to 70 years old. They're all there to learn skills and develop themselves, but they all face different challenges—some have learning disabilities, full-time jobs, are single parents, and may be academically underprepared and struggling to keep up in their classes. Many of them are tired, frustrated, and maybe even confused and lost. My role is often to remind them of their ability to essentially live the Dharma—they can accept that circumstances change and that they don't have control over all of their causes and conditions, but they can choose their responses to these... I'm included in these people; I learn from students everyday." Most importantly, she tries her best to be compassionate and non-judgmental, and to be sensitive to students' unique causes and conditions. "And," she added, "compassion seems to be needed in so many aspects of our lives—our work, family, friends, community, and societies, especially right now in politics. There always seems to be a need for more of it."

Ana mentioned how thankful she is to be reassured that she doesn't need to prove that she's a "good Buddhist" to be accepted as part of the Sangha. Interestingly, she added, "The irony is that without that pressure, I want to contribute more. Instead of worrying if I'm doing it right or doing enough, I can think about what to do. Now, I haven't really figured that out yet—what I can do to help the Sangha, the community, and others. But I'm inspired. I have more confidence to consider my responses instead of doing things the way they've always been done. And, as a consequence, I'm very happy... And it's compounded by the potential to do so with other people in the Sangha."

Ana closed her talk with the following concluding remarks: "Thank you for the happiness you've brought to me and my family... I'm excited to see how my family and I continue to grow here. Most of all, I look forward to continuing to listen and practice with you and experiencing the beauty of "Namu Amida Butsu."

1st Generation Dharma Seeds Presentation

On the following Sunday, the 1st generation Dharma Seeds, Greg, Kathy, and Wayne, devised a radically different kind of "dharma talk." It actually was more like Dharma Quiz Show that featured difficult questions asked of ministers Rinban Ito, Rev. Hasegawa, Rev. Fujii, and myself. Oh, and did I mention there was a two-minute time limit to our responses—per-



haps acknowledging our tendency to go on *much* longer than two minutes?

The opening question was addressed to Rev. Hasegawa: "If you were speaking to a person who'd never been exposed to Buddhism and you had time to discuss only one Buddhist teaching, which would you pick?" I don't exactly remember what Hasegawa sensei said. Maybe that was because I was fixated on watching the signs being held up in front of him that read "1 minute," "30 seconds"...and then noting sensei's frustration as a small bell was rung. Wait... wasn't that actually a *kin* like the kind used to signal the ending points during chanting? All the ministers know the sound of the *kin*, but this was a new context for it.

When it came to my turn, I was asked, "In the Three Treasures it says, 'I take refuge in the Buddha. May we together as one begin on the great path of Enlightenment, and hold in our hearts the supreme aspiration.' What is meant by 'the supreme aspiration'?" I gave the simple "dictionary definition" that the

supreme aspiration refers to *hongan*, which is part of the name of our temple and denomination; "Honganji" means "temple of the crucial innermost wish or aspiration to attain Buddhahood, awakening, or enlightenment."

Three of the questions were related in that they specifically addressed the complex issue of the future of Buddhism in America: "Today many people do not see a need for religion. How do you think these people's lives would be enhanced by learning and practicing Jodo Shinshu?" and, "What are three things that you think would help to expand the awareness of Buddhism in America?, and also, "What is one thing you'd like to see our temple engaged in that it's not involved in now?" This last question was addressed to me and, given the time restriction, I stated that standard answers like "more outreach" and "social engagement" are very important, but the most important thing is that we ourselves sincerely listen to the teachings. Everything else follows naturally from that. I didn't mention it at the time, but I think the talks of both Ana and Nicole (which will be discussed next) exemplify how Buddhism can benefit oneself and others at the same time, and that these benefits all follow naturally from listening and studying the dharma together with others.

Excerpts from Nicole's Talk

The speaker for the third Sunday was Nicole, and she began her talk by stating, "I never liked public speaking and it has been a few years since I had to do it. The last time was with my former job at a domestic violence shelter where I was a children's program coordinator. I gave many trainings on empowerment, non-violent parenting, and the effects of DV on children. And during these trainings I wouldn't go too much into my personal experiences for many reasons and I realized now it was partly



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due to my ego...I didn't want to be judged or felt sorry for, or to be thought of as weak or as a victim. But today will be different. I knew that when I spoke today, I would try to let my guard down... but I just didn't know how I would do it. Would I become emotional? I hope not! But is it so bad to be vulnerable?"

However, while Nicole acknowledged that being vulnerable is a scary feeling, "There are positives to vulnerability," she said. "It allows you to feel discomfort, grow, and connect with yourself. You are seen as human. And real. And you will find it easier to connect with others authentically. It is necessary to be vulnerable to truly connect with others." She also acknowledged that one's vulnerability can also be a source of strength. Realizing this, she began to feel more comfortable with letting her guard down.

As far as how to do that, Nicole recalled, "Rev. Peter has discussed that it is important to study the Dharma and share the Dharma naturally with others, and I realized what comes naturally to me is singing...especially when I let my ego go...Now I just need to find a song that can be thought of as Buddhist." Then, when she got in her car that day and turned the radio on, the song that was playing was "Landslide" by Stevie Nicks. "How perfect it was that this song played at that moment," she said. "Most times when I hear this song I would have a lot of feelings and when I would sing it I would cry...just like I did in the car that day."

Nicole went on to describe some of the difficulties—her personal landslides—she had experienced in her life. Not only had she experienced abuse as a child, but then as a young adult, "I found myself in a domestic violence relationship that I remained in for five years." Ultimately, she said, it's these difficulties that eventually, while in her early 30s, led her to Buddhism.

But upon encountering the Buddha's teachings, she said that his awakening to the reality of impermanence resonated with her. "He found that suffering is caused by our egos and control by holding on to things that were never meant to be permanent. Nothing lasts forever," she said.

And, like Ana, the timely reading of a book played a key role in leading her to Buddhism. "One day, my cousin lent me a book called *The Buddha and The Borderline* by writer, artist, and feminist Kiera Van Gelder." Nicole said that it was reading this book, one which presented a way of understanding life from the viewpoint of the Buddha's wisdom, that made her very curious about Buddhism. And that, "Finding out that Kiera had similar struggles as me which stemmed from childhood trauma was strangely relieving. I appreciated her vulnerability in writing about her personal suffering. I had always been curious about Buddhism. But I was terrified to go to a temple to find out more."

One day, Nicole happened to visit the Betsuin for a public lecture that was being offered. "I was introduced to Rev. Peter Hata who told me about the Wednesday Night Study Class and since then they have not been able to get rid of me. I have been attending three years this September. And that trips me out as I have *never* stayed with anything for that length of time, let alone coming regularly to a class. Maybe it's because it doesn't feel like a religion to me, just a way of living by seeking awakening. Yes, I know that we are all interconnected, and my ego is the main cause of my suffering, and nothing is permanent. But knowing that and really understanding and actually living it has been difficult and shows that I am not fully awakened... maybe only brief moments of awakening. And I believe that may be the case for everyone. And that is okay. Buddhism is a path, not a destination."

"I have learned that my actions, both good and bad, send a ripple effect throughout the world...so I try to love more and not act out in a rage...aka 'road rage.' That has been hard. I learned that I cause my suffering by thinking about the past, worrying about the future, and trying to control my life. And I have learned that everyone should be viewed as a Buddha, or a teacher.

Nicole admitted that this latter teaching has been hard, "especially during this current political climate." Currently, she struggles with the question of how Buddhism and activism go together. "I know that Buddhism and

my role in activism have a commonality of finding genuine liberation for all sentient beings...And I question, Will we always suffer because my brothers and sisters are suffering from ancestral trauma, societal trauma, political trauma, and personal trauma? Is this what the Buddha meant when saying something along the lines of, 'I am not a Buddha until everyone is a Buddha?'"

In concluding her talk, Nicole said, "As you can see, I am still learning and will be until I take my last breath. Everyone and everything is my teacher. Which brings me back to the lyrics of *landslide*. To me it is like a Buddhist biography of life. You climb and make it to the top and feel like you finally have everything figured out and life is in place. You may think you know yourself well and take great pride and your ego is as big as the universe. But life happens. Things change and a landslide brings it all down...We begin to realize that we are impermanent and you see this as children age, and you look in the mirror and find out you are aging too. So, I wish you all the following as we go through this thing called life: *May the child within your heart rise above, May you sail through the changing ocean tides, May you handle the seasons of your life.*"

Conclusion

On behalf of Higashi Honganji, I'd like to express my deep appreciation to all the Dharma Seeds for their wonderful and memorable contributions. And actually, we should all keep in mind that sharing the dharma is something we all can do. This goes to the core of the Buddha's teaching of *Namu Amida Butsu*. As we see in the Buddha's life, in Shinran Shonin's life, in the story of the *Larger Sutra*, and in the lives of countless contemporary Buddhist teachers—and in the lives of the Dharma Seeds themselves—listening to and hearing the dharma, which is receiving wisdom in Buddhism, naturally leads to sharing the dharma, which is compassion in Buddhism. As our Buddhist teachers point out, wisdom and compassion are inseparable; it's not possible to truly receive the wisdom of the Buddha's teachings and not also work to share it with others.



West Covina Kiku Crafts & Food Fair

The 9th Annual **Kiku Craft & Food Fair** will be held on **Sunday, November 5, 2017**, from 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM at the East San Gabriel Valley Japanese Community Center, 1203 West Puente Ave, West Covina, California. This event will present Asian inspired crafts, clothing, giftware, unique wood items and a variety of delicious foods. Join us for a fun day of shopping, eating, trivia questions and raffle prizes!

There will be no central cashiering. Each vendor will handle their own sales and not all vendors take credit cards. Free admission and free parking.

Come for some holiday shopping, Stay for the fun and food!

This fundraiser is sponsored by the West Covina Buddhist Temple.

MEMBERSHIP Update

Paid 2017 Temple Members will receive the following benefits *upon request* from the office

- 10% off coupons
- Fugetsu-Do - Toyo Miyatake

Membership dues for 2017 are \$300.00 for couple/family and \$150.00 for single members. **We no longer send out membership cards. Please keep your receipt as proof of membership.** Thank you for your continued support.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE!

Submissions for *The Way* are due the 10th of each month for the following month's issue. Articles and announcements for our January Issue are due December 10th, 2017. Submissions may be subject to printing restrictions and staff approval. Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you!