



~ The third General Meeting ~

The 3rd General Meeting of International Ladies Association of Buddhism (ILAB) was held in Kodosan temple on April 24th, 2010. Members from Germany, France, China, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, USA and Japan experienced *Zen* meditation and enjoyed a lecture on the comparison between Buddhism and Shinto.

OPENNING:

Greeting by Chairperson



In the beginning, Ms. Okano Rinko, Chairperson of ILAB, welcomed the participants warmly and addressed the opening speech. She said she was glad that many people joined the meeting, especially non-Buddhist people have developed an interest in Buddhism.

She mentioned that April is a very important month for Buddhists, because Buddha Shyakyamuni was born on April 8th. Many temples in Japan hold ceremonies on this day to commemorate his birth. Also in Japan, the Buddha's enlightenment is celebrated on December 8th, as well as the day of his passing away on February 15th. However, in other nations in south-east Asia, the celebrations of all three memorial days fall on the same day- a full moon day in May.

Buddhists do not consider the Buddha's death as a sad event, because we think that when the Buddha reached enlightenment, he dispelled all his disturbing emotions and negativities; when he passed away, he even dispelled his physical body, and then he entered Nirvana, the state of eternal happiness.

Representing ILAB, we wish that Buddhists can be more aware of our own identity and that we will be able to study the Buddha's teachings in depth. For this purpose, we would like to offer opportunities for Buddhist people to receive good quality education and opportunities to understand each other beyond countries, denominations, and cultures. We wish Buddhist people can work for others and for the betterment of the society. ”

PROGRAM 1 :

Zazen Session(Soto-style meditation)

Rev. Kogai Maruyama, a nun from *Soto* sect of Japanese Buddhism, guided the *Zazen* session. Firstly, she taught us what *Zazen* is.



She said that according to *Soto* sect, *Zazen* is not a method of attaining enlightenment. It is a pure manifestation of our Buddha nature. Whenever we practise *Zazen*, Buddha nature reveals in us. It is an embodiment of universal compassion. Universal compassion emerges in *Zazen* itself, or in other words, a person who practises *Zazen* shows or attains universal compassion.

She said that *Zazen* and meditation are different. In meditation, you can conduct mental activities or concentration, but it often creates tension in your

body and mind. In *Zazen*, we do not do any mental exercises. It gives you complete relaxation because we can feel ourselves become a part of the great nature. The great nature sustains our life whenever we sleep or awake. However, we usually do not realize it. If you practise *Zazen*, you will notice that your body is not your own creation but you yourself are a part of great nature.

She went on to explain that our thought rises one after another. We always think about something. In *Zazen*, we stop all the grasping. We should let go of clinging to any worries or troubles, as all the worries and troubles are emptiness in nature. In our daily life, having some quiet time is very important, even just one minute of tranquility. Your body is a precious treasure which you received from the great nature, and we should give it a moment of tranquility from time to time.

Rev. Maruyama also demonstrated that during the session, tutor monks will walk amongst the practitioners to help them when necessary. If you fall asleep or if you are losing concentration, the monk will give you a slight "hit" on the shoulder with a long wooden stick called "*kyosaku*" to wake you up!



After Rev. Maruyama's detailed explanation, all participants practised *Soto*-style *Zazen* under her guidance with great concentration. When the session was finished, the participants swayed their bodies slightly in different directions to release the tension created during *Zazen*. All participants appreciated the peacefulness and tranquility they feel after the session.

PROGRAM 2: Shinto-Buddhist Syncretism

The afternoon program was a lecture on the comparison between Buddhism and *Shinto* given by Prof. Hiroko Maruyama. She is a lecturer from

Waseda University, and she is also one of Board Directors of ILAB. The lecture was about the similarity and the relationship between Buddhism and *Shinto* which are two major religions of Japan.



Shinto is the domestic religion of Japan while Buddhism was brought to the country in the 6th century. According to official documents, Buddhism was first introduced to Japan in 538 by the King of Paekche, a territory on the western Korean Peninsula. The delegation from the King of Paekche sent the emperor an image of the Buddha and sutras.

At that time, advanced countries in East Asia governed administration according to fixed laws and Buddhism. Japan was trying to establish such a kind of system based on the Chinese model. So it was essential for Japan to accept Buddhism in order to join the East Asian Society.

When Buddhism was introduced to Japan, there were different attitudes towards Buddhism amongst the ruling class. Some were Anti-Buddhism and others were Pro-Buddhism, which was highly connected with their political power balance. For example, *Mononobe* family was anti-Buddhism, and *Soga* family was pro-Buddhism. Emperors also showed different attitudes towards Buddhism. The 29th Emperor *Kinmei* was in throne when Buddhism was introduced, and he was neutral towards Buddhism. The 30th Emperor *Bidatsu* did not believe in Buddhism. The 31st Emperor *Yomei* believed in Buddhism and respected *Shinto*. The 33rd Emperor *Suiko* was neutral, the 37th emperor *Saimei* made Buddhism the religion of the Palace and held the "*Ennoe*" ceremony to pray for peace and security of the nation. The 38 Emperor *Tenji* was also pro-Buddhism. The 40th Emperor *Tenmu* placed Buddhism as the national religion. It took about 150 years for Japan to establish Buddhism as a religion.

~ Outing to Sojiji Temple~

ILAB members and guests visited *Sojiji* Temple on May 30, 2010. It is the head temple of *Soto* sect of Japanese *Zen* Buddhism. This tour was so popular that we became a group of 37 people with participants from France, USA, India, Nepal, Taiwan and Japan. The program of this outing included a talk from a *Zen* monk, *Zazen* session, tour in the temple, and special vegetarian lunch prepared by monks. We enjoyed the opportunity to experience the essence of *Zen* spirit.

A talk by a monk



Sojiji temple was originally established about 675 years ago in *Ishikawa* prefecture, but the temple was destroyed by a big fire about 100 years ago. The monks of the temple decided to rebuild it as a new monastery temple in Tsurumi, Yokohama, which is nearer to the center of the nation and easier to access for many people. Now *Sojiji* temple has about 80 acres (approximately 323,680 square meters) of land. About 100 training monks and 50 tutor monks practise in the temple. Master Dogen, the founder of *Soto Zen* sect, pointed out that *Zen* is to look at your life deeply. All activities in our lives can be a practice of *Zen*. Master Keizan, the founder of *Sojiji* temple, believed that *Zen* can be meaningful only when it saves people. Therefore, he taught *Zazen* extensively to the popularity.

Buddhism usually teaches about enlightenment, but *Zen* Buddhism claims that practice itself is important and that activities in our daily life are the practice. One may think that sitting in the *Zazen* posture is difficult, but once you get used to it, you will know that it is the most relaxing posture of sitting. *Zen* practices are the foundation of our daily life. It influences our way of thinking and how we spend our life.

He has practised and taught *Zazen* for a long time, but he never felt that he was a "veteran" in *Zazen*, because every session is a new experience. Every

day is a fresh day. No one knows what will happen in a new day. He said "We cannot control the past or the future. We can only control the present. Only "now" and "here" is important." After his talk, the participants tried *Zazen* for 20 minutes.

Tour in the Temple



Next, we went on a tour in the temple. Cleaning the building is a part of everyday routine for the practising monks. We could see that everywhere in the buildings was perfectly clean and shiny.



In the *Butsuden* (the Buddha's hall), we offered incense and recited sutra in front of the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni.

Special Vegetarian Lunch

Many *Zen* temples offer special vegetarian meals called "*Shojin Ryori*". Monks eat very simple meals (such as congee, beancurd and preserved vegetables etc) everyday with strict rules of eating.

For visitors, they offer a more sophisticated meal with a variety of vegetarian dishes. At the end of the explanation on eating manners by the monks, we enjoyed the special meal.



~ Announcements ~

★ Outing to Kamakura on October 2nd 2010 (Saturday)

We are visiting "*Daibutsu*", a famous big statue of the Buddha and *Komyoji* temple in Kamakura. *Komyoji* is one of main temples of Jodo sect and it stands near the sea. Please don't miss this occasion!

★ 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 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'.)



INTERNATIONAL LADIES ASSOCIATION OF BUDDHISM (ILAB)

38 Torigoe, Kanagawa-ku, Yokohama, Japan 〒221-0064

Email: info_ilabuddhism@yahoo.co.jp FAX: (045) 434-1188