



The Buddhist Temple of Chicago

November 2023

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**Thank you to Noreen Enkoji,
Dennis Chan, Helene Rom,
and April Kellman for
helping assemble last
month's bulletin!**



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At the Oct. 1 Sunday service, the Oshita family received the Certificate of Appreciation for their parents, Yutaka (Bob) and Florence Oshita and also for their uncle and aunt, George and Mary Maruyama. We appreciate all the years of volunteer help from the Oshita and Maruyama families (photo by Lynnell L)

An Ugly Duckling Finally Sees Himself on the Lake of Amida

An Interview with Reverend Frederick Brenion with Mon, Vol. 26

(a previous publication of Higashi Honganji, Kyoto)

Frederick Brenion provides service for the Higashi Honganji Temples and members of our North American District. Active as a Jodo Shinshu (Shin Buddhism) priest, he is brought close to people. From his book-lined room, wearing his priest's garb, he good-naturedly related to us through the online screen his encounter with Buddhism and our Shin Buddhism. He began to chat this way: "When I share my story, I start with another story called The Ugly Duckling." So saying, Frederick began with Hans Christian Andersen's classic story.

"Once upon a time, a chick hatched from an egg in a mother duck's nest who looked and acted differently from the mother and other chicks. This duck could not quack, waddle, or swim like the others, always failing. So "ugly" to their duck beauty. Then the "Ugly Duckling" left the flock. Wherever it went it was bullied for being so ugly. Time passed, and alone, the duckling endured winter. Yet spring arrived and the ice on the lake melted. Soon a flock of swans flew onto the lake. Amazed at their graceful appearance would the swans ridicule the duckling? "Why?," they said, "You are one of us!" Feeling they were just mocking, all that could now be done was to bow in humility to them. As this happened the duckling's glance saw itself reflected back from the lake's surface. Realization! The duckling's appearance was the same as that of the beautiful swans! All along the duckling had been a swan just like them! The duckling's true self was made clear. Flying off with the other swans, now it could be seen the duck family. The former Ugly Duckling saw their beauty. They were wonderful as they are! And the duckling, who had always been a swan, had found completion. Discovering its true face, its true self, the Ugly Duckling found a place to belong as a Swan within a flock of Swans."

An Ugly Duckling Finally Sees Himself on the Lake of Amida (continued)

Readers and listeners to this story may have various interpretations. Concerning this story Frederick says, "I find this story to be a lens to see my own story." As an infant he was raised Christian and embraced it whole-heartedly. Being insatiably curious as a young teen, he became interested in the sacred books and scriptures of the world's religions. He had questions such as "What is truth? Who am I? Why am I?" Entering university, he majored in religious studies and philosophy, studying many books in those fields. He also came to realize that the best work for him would be as a librarian where he would then have access to all the great stories and thoughts that might help him on his way, and as a way for him to help others to discover their questions and answers.

In time, he was employed as a librarian at a state mental hospital for the criminally insane. He recreated their library, introduced new books, answered questions, and listened to their troubles. In doing so he discovered his own humanity with them and realized that he too was a foolish human being in so many ways. What we in Shin Buddhism call our bombu nature.

During all this, Frederick continued to probe, examining his own beliefs. While it took much time, he found the growing weight of his problems and difficulties led eventually to a complete collapse of belief. It all dissolved, leading him to enter into having "no-views" on so many things. He did not know this would be so important in truly seeing the Buddhist path. He had studied and learned things through "Christian Eyes" but now he was beginning to see with "naked eyes," without filters. But he was not fully there yet.

One day later, his daughter rode with him on an errand. She turned and said, "Dad, you would be a very good Buddhist!" For him this was so much like the situation when the "ugly duckling" saw with surprise his form as a swan reflected in the lake. At that moment he finally saw Buddhism with "naked eyes" and he realized that that was what Buddhism was really all about to see his true face, and it was a Buddhist face! Then a momentary vision of walking in peace through a gigantic grove of trees...dressed in Buddhist robes! After this drive his world had altered.

So Frederick threw himself into the study of Buddhism. He read, researched, and if you saw the books behind him, you will see that he went to great extent! In time he realized that reading was not enough. He needed to live all this in the context of a Sangha to truly test it out. And so he turned his attention to find a Sangha.

At first he searched for Zen, Tibetan, and Theravada groups. All he knew about Shin, according to many of his books, was that it was a kind of Christianity for Buddhists! Say a prayer to Amida and go to Buddha Heaven! Why would he want that? He had left Christianity behind. Failing to find a temple he could fit in at, he eventually found a listing for the West Covina Buddhist Temple, 55 miles away! But he wanted the Dharma badly! Researching first he discovered it was a Pure Land group! What else could he do? So he went to see.

He sat in the last row to observe the activities with a mixture of "curiosity and some dread," ready to slip out quietly if need be. But at the start he was greeted by one of their wonderful members, Joanie Martinez. He was relieved that some of the service would be in English! Shown the service book, he followed along. He read the Shoshin-ge translation during the service and was utterly astonished. There were passages that simply leapt out at him. Above all, he met Reverend Kawawata, who was then the temple minister at West Covina. Frederick said of Rev. Kawawata, "His English was not great but his heart shined openly with joy in his talks!" Frederick kept coming back. He was won over!

An Ugly Duckling Finally Sees Himself on the Lake of Amida (continued)

What really grabbed Frederick was the discussions after each talk. His own words just poured out. Too many big words at times, but that happens when a librarian comes to the Dharma! Above all he found, that like the Ugly Duckling, he really fitted in for the first time ever. He also found the true import of Jodo Shinshu. That at the center of his being he was not that bright of a chap but very much a foolish person, a bombu. That he was accepted as he was and to rely on the nenbutsu whose import met his deepest needs. An answer behind all his questions. Here he could continue to truly see himself as he is and everyone as they are.

In 2011 Frederick became a Jodo Shinshu priest, a member of our North American District. He said that when he visited the Shinshu Hombyo (Higashi Honganji) in Kyoto, he came to appreciate Jodo Shinshu's struggles and his own helplessness. "But that is where we all must begin!" He is active as a helper for the other ministers and temples as needed throughout the District. As for his future prospects, "When I first visited, I was warmly welcomed. I want to welcome warmly all who come, just as I was. Having the skills of a librarian, I think I might be helpful in helping others with their questions!" He also knows quite a few books that he can recommend as well! Also, he added that he would perhaps like to write a book too someday, at least while all that he has studied is still in his head!



Scheduled activities – subject to change

Weekly services – Sundays 11am - in-person, Facebook Live November 5th

Second Sunday Children's Dharma School service – November 12th

Qigong (Chinese exercise) – Tuesdays 11am - in-person only

Sunday Meditation 9:00 – in-person only

Thursday Meditation 7:15pm – Nov 9th Facebook Live, other days FB Live & in-person

Aikido (martial art) – Sundays 3:30pm – in-person only

Asoka Society (social gathering) – 3rd Saturday 1pm – November 18th

The above activities are open to the public and free (donations appreciated).

If you are interested in the two activities below, please leave your contact information and the group will set up an appointment for you to visit them.

Iaido (martial art) – Mondays 7:00pm

Kokyo Taiko (drums) – Friday evenings, Sunday afternoons

Introducing Rev. Fred Brenion by Bill Bohlman, Temple President

With Rev. Patti's retirement the temple no longer has a resident minister. However, as we embark on our search for the next resident minister there is a plan in place to provide us with ministerial guidance. Rev. Fred Brenion has agreed to act as supervising minister until such time as we have a new resident minister.

Although Rev. Brenion will not be here in person, he lives in Yucaipa, CA, he will arrange for the minister's message at Sunday service. For shotsuki hoyo and other important Sundays, Rev. Brenion will speak live via the internet. In the event Rev. Brenion is not available on those days he will arrange for other ministers to speak. On the weeks that Rev. Brenion is not speaking live he will assist us with prerecorded dharma talks. In addition to helping with Sunday service, Rev. Brenion will also provide an article for the Bulletin each month. His article this month is one originally published in a Higashi Honganji publication in Kyoto discussing his path to ordination.

The role of the supervising minister is an important one. Prior to her retirement, Rev. Patti trained a number of members on how to do the various parts of Sunday service. As such, we are able to continue service very much as it was before. However, it was felt that to maintain credibility within the service the main message should usually be delivered by a minister. Rev. Patti reached out to various ministers and Rev. Brenion was one who was willing to take on the role. This is a new path for us and Rev. Brenion; as time goes by we will develop this role together.

The success of Sunday service, and all temple activities, depends on the involvement of the sangha. As the older, long-time members are no longer able to help as much as before, the next generation of leaders needs to emerge. As we enter our 80th year let's rededicate ourselves to the future of BTC.

DEEPEST SYMPATHY

To the family and friends of

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Tomiko Inouye | September 22, 2023 |
| Tomoko "Tommi" Tomiyama | October 10, 2023 |
| Yasushi Okada | October 18, 2023 |



DHARMA SCHOOL

Second Sunday of the Month

Open to all school age kids



For more information:

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



November 2023 Calendar

Events may be canceled or moved:

Check www.facebook.com/budtempchi
for the most up-to-date changes.

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| | | | 1 | 2 Meditation 7:15pm | 3 Taiko* 7pm | 4 |
| 5 9:00am Meditation 11am Monthly Memorial 3:30pm Aikido | 6 Iaido* 7:00pm | 7 | 8 | 9 Meditation 7:15pm FB only | 10 Taiko* 7pm | 11 |
| 12 9:00am Meditation 11am Dharma School service 3:30pm Aikido | 13 Iaido* 7:00pm | 14 | 15 | 16 Meditation 7:15pm | 17 Taiko* 7pm | 18 1pm Asoka |
| 19 9:00am Meditation 11am Service | 20 Iaido* 7:00pm | 21 11am Qi-Gong | 22 | 23 Meditation 7:15pm | 24 Taiko* 7pm | 25 |
| 26 9:00am Meditation 11am Service 3:30pm Aikido | 27 Iaido* 7:00pm | 28 11am Qi-Gong | 29 | 30 Meditation 7:15pm | | |

*Iaido and Taiko require appointments made in advance