Sometimes, it’s good for Shin Buddhists to consider the perspectives of Buddhists from other traditions. With that in mind, “An Open Letter to the Buddhist Community,” a report from the Conference of Western Buddhist Teachers, which included the Dalai Lama, was added to our site’s Real World Buddhism section. Twenty-two well-known Western teachers such as Stephen Batchelor, Jack Kornfield, and Robert Thurman agreed on six key points of emphasis for sharing the Dharma in the West. Apparently, Shin Buddhists are unfortunately out of this particular “loop,” yet I feel we would heartily support, for example, the emphasis of working towards creating a better world for all forms of life (over simply “building membership”), guarding against the ever-present dangers of sectarianism, and being open to adapting the presentation of Buddhism to serve the West. As these teachers clearly state, “We need to exercise careful discrimination in distinguishing between essential teachings and cultural trappings.”

Gassho,
Peter Hata

Selected E-mail
From = Yana Portuguez
Subject = Sunday Services
Message = Hello, I’ve been looking for a temple for some years now and I think that I will come to the next Sunday service. Is there a separate service for children (similar to Sunday school)? If so, is there an age requirement? My son is almost 4 and he’s never been to any type of temple service before. Thanks!

Dear Yana,
Please see L.D. NEWS, con’t on page 4

WCBT Sangha in February: On the Move!

Once again, WCBT’s more adventurous, risk-taking Sangha members (though we always seem to avoid dire predictions of heavy rain!) will make the trek up to the San Luis Obispo Buddhist Temple for the annual Family Retreat over President’s Day Weekend (February 18-20). Check the Living Dharma Website’s Library (under Retreats and Seminars), where there are several articles with in-depth coverage and photos of past retreats. If you are undecided about going, ask any of our Sangha who’ve gone why they make time for this special retreat.

Then, as many of you know, on Sunday, February 27, the WCBT Sangha will trek over to the Los Angeles Higashi Honganji Betsuin in Little Tokyo, located at 505 E. 3rd Street, Los Angeles (between San Pedro and Central Ave). Our Sangha, as well as members from Newport Beach Higashi Honganji, will participate in the Betsuin’s Sunday Service, and then the combined Sanghas will be filmed singing I’m a Link in the Golden Chain, Gordon Ah’Tye’s wonderful gatha, the charming gatha A Special Place and, in honor of this year being Shinran Shonin’s 750th memorial, a stirring version of the classic, Shinran Sama—all courtesy of WCBT’s own Bodhi Tree Band. This footage, along with footage to be shot up at our other affiliated temple, Berkeley Higashi, will all be combined into a DVD which will be shown in May at the Higashi Honganji World Dobo Convention and 750th Memorial for Shinran Shonin, to be held in Osaka, Japan. Talk about a trek!
DHARMA SCHOOL NEWS

For those of you who have had the unique companionship of pets, please come to our annual pet memorial service on February 13th. If you’d like to share a photo or a drawing of a beloved pet, this is certainly the opportunity to share and honor its memory. Immediately following the service, our Dharma school staff and students will continue our tradition of visiting the Atria Retirement Home in Covina to drop off some Valentine decorations for the residents. The smiles of appreciation are inspiring to each of us. It should be mentioned that such acts of dana are not limited to the Dharma School. So many of our members have been collecting the pull-tabs from aluminum cans in support of the recycling program at the Ronald MacDonald House (there’s one in Pasadena and Loma Linda, CA). Thank you everyone!

With Gassho,
Diane Hata

Higashi Honganji’s New Bishop Addresses WCBT Sangha

At the January 23, 2011 Eitaikyo Service, newly-appointed Bishop Noriaki Ito, gave a well-received Dharma talk to the WCBT Sangha. In his talk, Bishop told a story from the ancient Jataka Tales, “The Rabbit and the Moon,” which movingly expressed the deep nature of true compassion—in the story, a rabbit offers to give his life so that a hungry human traveler can have something to eat. Interestingly however, Ito sensei admitted that, as much as he’d like to identify with the compassionate rabbit, the truth is, it is the fortunate recipient of compassion—the traveler—with whom he is actually able to identify with. In this way, his talk seemed to naturally tie into the theme of “Now, Life is Living You”; a person of the nembutsu is deeply appreciative of the myriad causes and conditions that have allowed them to live.

All of us at WCBT congratulate Bishop Ito on his appointment and pledge to give him our full and enthusiastic support.

WCBT Dharma School Superintendent Delivers the Goods

Over her Holiday break, WCBT’s Dharma School Superintendent, Diane Hata, drops off a large bag (actually, several large bags) of aluminum can pull-tabs in the collection box at the Loma Linda Ronald McDonald House. These pull-tabs, collected and donated by the Sangha, help the charitable organization provide help for families so they can stay close by their hospitalized child at little or no cost.

Quote of the Month

All of Shinran Shonin’s efforts were made to describe the indescribable truth in order to share what he has received. I believe this is also the work I should accept as a kaikyoshi. When I try to express what I receive, I need to describe something beyond words and concepts, and translate them into English. This process then is twice as difficult and is truly a challenge for me since English is not my first language. Yet, I believe that, through this process, I am given twice the opportunities to examine seriously how I listen to the teachings and what I really receive.

-Rev. Nobuko Miyoshi
SLOBT Family Retreat
2011 Family Retreat will be held on President’s weekend February 18-20 at the San Luis Obispo Buddhist Temple. This year’s theme is “The spirit of Mahayana Buddhism” with Rev. Masao Kodani as our special speaker. Costs are $35 for adults and $10 for children. This includes all activities, food and lodging for those who choose to stay at the temple. Those who decide to stay at a motel are asked to make their own reservations. Plan to arrive Friday night to touch bases with everyone, then plan on a full day Saturday of stimulating discussions, fun activities, too much food and unforgettable memories all in a beautiful secluded setting. Sunday, the final day, goes quickly since we are finished by 1:00 PM.

Sign-ups are at the service and for more info, contact Rev. Ken.

Pets Memorial Service
A special service will be held on February 13 at 10:00 AM to remember our animal friends. Everyone who has lost a pet is invited to pay tribute to them on this special day.

Sing-Along at Betsuin
WCBT will join Newport Beach at the downtown Betsuin on February 27 when all sangha members will join together to sing three gathas accompanied by the Bodhi Tree Band. The performance will be video recorded for a DVD to be shown in Japan in May at the 2011 World Dobo Convention.

Oldies Dance XXXVIII
Oldies XXXVIII, “Make it a Date!” is set for Saturday March 26, in the Year of the Rabbit. Steve Kikuchi & High Resolution will provide our favorite hits from the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s. The dance begins at 8:00 PM and will end at 12:00 PM with lots of good fun and food in between. Presale tickets are $12 or $15 at the door. For info and song requests, call Joanie at (626) 284-8192 or Roy at (909) 973-2580.

Your Toban chairs will contact you about work shifts and assignments. Plan to come by the center about 6 PM to help with the set-up. Donations are welcome for raffle prizes and drinks. Sign-up sheets for drinks will be at the Sunday service.

Please note that the dance will end 30 minutes earlier so our clean-up hopefully will also end earlier.

Spring Ohigan Service
Spring Ohigan will be observed on March 13 at 4:30 PM. Our special guest speaker will be Rev. Bill Briones. Please join us in welcoming Rev. Briones and stay for the complimentary otoki dinner following the service.

Study Center Lecture Series
The Study Center Lecture Series continues in April with “Modern Thinkers of Shin Buddhism.” Bishop Noriaki Ito will alternate with Rev. Ryojin Soga and Rev. Daiei Kaneko to lead us in the series. The lectures will be held every Tuesday evenings in April at 7:00 PM. More information will be in the March Gateway or contact Rev. Ken.

Mark your calendars for WCBT’s 15th Annual Golf Classic which will be held on Friday, May 6, at the Pacific Palms Golf Course in the City of Industry. It will be a shot-gun start at 1:00 PM. More details will be in upcoming Gateways or contact Jack or Julie.

February Birthdays
Sumiye Arnheim, Paul Konno, Michael Jitosho, Hisako Koga, Evan Okamura, Joanie Martinez, Deanna Ormseth, Sophia Saucedo, Jose Godoy, Matthew Woo
Thank you for visiting our website. Regarding your questions, in the traditional ritual and sermon portion of the service, which lasts about 30-45 minutes, everyone can participate; there’s no age limit. Those with very young kids (i.e., infants and toddlers) usually sit near the back for obvious reasons, but your 4-year old should not have any problem. Of course, I’ve often wondered exactly what young kids “take away” from their first temple visits—the chanting, incense, and altar symbols must seem rather strange. However, though it may be difficult for young people in general to appreciate, Buddhism does have many valuable lessons to teach them.

I guess that’s where our Sunday School staff can help. After the service portion, the kids (from about aged 2 up to high school) go to classrooms for various activities for about a half hour or so. At that time, the staff can answer any questions your son might have. You yourself have the option of staying with your son or participating in an adult informal discussion. In the latter, newcomers often ask questions about Buddhism.

If you are coming, please try to arrive a few minutes before 10:00 am, so that you can briefly meet Rev. Kawawata.

Best Wishes,
Peter Hata
The Living Dharma Website

Dear Peter,
I have several books on teaching meditation to young children and we’ve been doing so at home for the last year but I believe we would both benefit from attending. I’d like him to see that there are other people who practice (no one else in our family is Buddhist). Additionally I feel that learning from someone else besides me will probably help him considerably. He will most likely be more eager when he sees other children are there.

I’ve practiced meditation & studied several Buddhist texts independently for almost 10 years and I think it’s high time I seek additional wisdom from a living source.

Thank you so much & I am looking forward to visiting.

Yana

From = Ron Wood
Subject = January 23 @ 10:00 am, Eitai-kyo Service
Message = I was thinking of attending my first service on the 23rd and noticed it is a “major” service. What makes it a major service and can a first timer come? Thanks.

Dear Ron,
Thank you for writing. You are welcome to attend any of our services! A “major” service is usually one that involves commemorating some aspect of the Buddha’s life, such as his birth (Hanamatsuri), awakening (Bodhi Day), and his passing into parinirvana (Nirvana Day). Also major are those days we commemorate moments in the life of the founder of our school of Buddhism, Shinran Shonin. The Eitai-kyo Service is when we commemorate all those of our loved ones and friends who have passed away. It is for us a very deep service because it reminds us that behind us is a long line of people, important in our lives and heritages, who have passed on what they could of the lessons of life. We, in turn, are handing it on to others, our children, friends, and people unknown to us in the future. In our tradition we seek to learn from everyone and everything. If you come to visit us we will try to learn from you! But in many ways we learn most from the departed because they are now teaching us the lessons of how they lived their lives and how, in their ends, we may learn to face our life’s conclusion. Perhaps you may find this rather heavy for your first exposure to us, but you may find this worthwhile. Our minister gave a very good talk on Eitai-kyo which you may find here: www.livingdharma.org/MemorableSermons/Kawawata-Eitai-kyo.html.

Also, this service is also major because our new Bishop will be giving the Dharma talk to us. He’s actually spoken before as he’s been a minister to our temple in the past, as well being the head of the Betsuin, our major temple in Los Angeles. So this is a return of a good friend. I think you will enjoy his presentation. On top of this, we’re also having our General Meeting in which we’ll talk about current matters and elect our Board of Directors. THEN we’ll have a fund-raiser lunch for our Jr. YBA (Young Buddhist Association). They’re asking for $10 for the lunch. Well! That’s a lot for one Sunday service! It may sound like an awful lot but I think it may give you a good sense of what our temple is all about and what it is trying to do. But if you like, stay for as much as you wish. If you have any questions please feel free to ask. When I first attended everyone was really cordial and helpful to me. At the time I was looking for a Sangha to practice Buddhism in. Instead I found a home in which to live Buddhism.

Gassho,
Fred Brench
The Living Dharma Website

To: dharma@livingdharma.org
From = Mouse
Subject = Thoughts
Message = I’ve been struggling to understand the basics about Buddhism for a while. What I gleaned from the pages I read made me lean toward dismissing it—it seemed a very negative and cowardly way of looking at life. I understood the pages to say, basically, that life sucks and the only thing to do about it is not really care about anything. I found this page yesterday, and it explains things in a way I find much easier to grasp. It showed me that my understanding could not have been more flawed. From what I now understand, Buddhists care about “everything.” They don’t believe that life is inherently horrible, so much as humans refuse to accept life and so perceive it as horrible; we don’t suffer because that is the nature of Life, but rather we choose to suffer by refusing to accept reality.

I was still having niggling thoughts/ doubts about some things I read, such as this: “to be human means to suffer.” On the surface, I don’t agree with that. But then it occurred to me that each of us can be more than human—that we are more, if only we would realize it. Each of us is everything, and so can
be anything. If you realize that, and dismiss that part of you that is “you,” if you embrace the interconnectedness of all Life, then you are no longer just human. You are Truth, Compassion, Understanding. You are everything and nothing. And the truth of the previous statement becomes apparent.

Interestingly enough, I’m finding my new understanding of Buddhism to mirror what I got from Landmark Education. I wonder if I go to the temple whether I will finally find other people who hold some of the beliefs, values, and philosophies I hold and try to live by. This feels like it could be one of the most momentous things of my life—not a religion, but teachings that may help me stay on a path my own mind and life have already placed me on. I would appreciate any thoughts you have, or any corrections to my current understanding that you want to provide. I have much more studying to do.

Dear Mouse,

Thank you for sharing your thoughts. I am very glad you gave Buddhism a second chance! It is unfortunate that when Western scholars first learned of Buddhism that when they translated key Buddhist words it sounded to them like some form of Nihilism—that there is no meaning or purpose to anything. This, as you are now discovering is far from the actual truth about Buddhism. It sounds strange to many that we emphasize impermanence, but because of impermanence we come to value and treasure everything. I think you are now discovering this.

Sincerely,
Fred Brenion

To: dharma@livingdharma.org
Subject: Karma Vs Law of attraction

Hello,

I’m 18 and I’ve studied Buddhism for 2 years and sometimes get doubts so I would be very pleased if you could help me find an answer to this question: Karma or Law of Attraction?

Buddha said: “He is able who thinks he is able.” This statement is very close to the Law of attraction idea because both focus on confidence (which is a quality required for success). But imagine this: A man wants a luxury car and he builds this confidence by using the Law of attraction method (and he thinks he is able like Buddha said) but at the same time he has the karma to be a very poor person. What happens? What I’m trying to say is that I think this quote goes against the karma theory.

Please I would be very grateful if you could help,
Best Regards,
Antonio

Dear Antonio,

Thank you for writing. I have a problem with your question. I have looked all over for the source of your quote, which appears at a lot of web sites, but not one gives a citation as to which sutra it is from. I found one Buddhist site, which already researched it, and determines it to be a fake quote attributed to the Buddha: “<http://www.bodhipaksa.com/archives/another-fake-buddha-quote-spotted-in-the-wild>www.bodhipaksa.com/archives/another-fake-buddha-quote-spotted-in-the-wild>”. I am inclined to agree. The quote, by itself, is to me unbuddhistic! Buddhism is about getting rid of our delusions and this quote seems to imply the opposite. From my own experience, I can testify that I have thought myself able to do many things for which I was not at all ready. Be that as it may, I find the “Law of Attraction” to be puzzling in itself, I gather it has become quite popular in a recent New Age self-help book called “The Secret”.

The “Law” is based on the notion of “Like attracting Like.” If you think good thoughts then good things will come, and vice versa. Certainly, as an aphorism there is some value to using this “Law” as a mental pick-me-up to help one be aware and approach reality in a positive sort of manner. A good attitude can create the opportunity of gaining good. BUT there is no guarantee that it must follow. I have known many positive oriented people, including myself, who suffer reversals and difficulties. Wikipedia has a very good analysis of the “Law of Attraction” that you should give thought to. I’ll quote one part here: “...the book has any basis in scientific reality” and that its premise contains “an ugly flipside: if you have an accident or disease, it’s your fault.” They asked, “If an airplane crashes, does that mean that one or more of the passengers brought that on himself? Do soldiers killed in Iraq simply not think enough positive thoughts?” For myself, as a Buddhist, I think Reality goes against the “Law of Attraction” theory.

But what of Karma? Karma is a very misunderstood word. Even in a Buddhist setting, many people use the word with a Hindu understanding. This confuses the issue. Karma simply means action. A hallmark of Buddhist thought is to look at causes, conditions, and effects. To use your example. You may have a desire for that luxury car. Why? What is the cause of that? Perhaps you have seen such cars and wanted one for yourself. Buddhism would ask you to look at your desires. Why do you have that desire? What would happen if you got your desire? Many people when they buy what they thought they wanted grow disappointed in it and move on to their next desire. Or they discover that there is a bigger price tag to what they bought, such as upkeep, repairs, and insurance. But you want the car anyway. So, are the conditions there for you to get it? Do you have a job? Can you afford the payments. If you lose your job you’re not going to get the car. Did you have bad thoughts that made you lose your job according to your “Law”? No. I know of lots of good people who lost their jobs in this recession through no fault of their own. Anyway, if you can get the right conditions...

Please see L.D. NEWS, con’t on page 6
then you have a better chance to get your car. The effects can be many. You are happy. You are sad -- when you see how much gas is going to cost you in your car. Any number of things. But it all rests on Causes, Conditions, and Effects. Get this straight and you’ve got much of Buddhism under your hat! You may have the cause - your desire, but if the conditions aren’t there you will never get the desired effect.

I don’t know if I’ve answered to your own satisfaction. Perhaps this email is not what you wanted to “attract.” But the fact that you asked indicates to me that you may be finding this “Law” to be not all that it is cracked up to be. Give thought to the analysis that scholars and scientists have given to it. And I invite you to consider the Buddhist “Law” of Causes, Conditions, and Effects, along with the Buddha’s analysis of why our desires lead us astray (The Four Noble Truths) as an approach to truly living life in a way that life is living you.

Sincerely,
Frederick Brenion
ご挨拶

北米開教監督
ロサンゼルス別院輪番 伊東憲昭

新年明けましておめでとうございます。2011年が皆様とご家族によりまして素晴らしい年となることを念っております。

昨年10月18日の井本朗監督の辞任に伴いまして、真宗大谷派安原晃宗務総長より11月27日付で北米開教監督を命じられました。

まずは前監督である井本先生の北米開教区並びに各寺院への多大なるご賛献に対しまして、門徒および関係者を代表してここに深く感謝の意を表します。今井前監督のご尽力により開教区の教化活動が盛んになり、昨年12月も真宗センターによる英語を母国語とする方々を対象にして教育プログラムの第二回研修会が開催され、今年中にも3名の有教師の誕生が期待されております。

正直な気持ちを申し上げますと、こように歴代の北米開教監督がなされお仕事をこの私が果たせるのか、さらには私の場合はロサンゼルス別院輪番の職も続けることにもなりますので私における役割をさせていただきます。また、開教区のことでもあがりが手がけられたことなどございましたら私の連絡先に気軽にご連絡下さいます。電話番号は(213)-626-4200 ito@hhbt-la.org 細々皆様とお会いできることが楽しみにしております。

最終になりますが、皆さんにおかれましては開教区および寺院へ今まで同様のご厚意を賜わりますようお願い申し上げます。共に念仏の道を歩み続け、共に宗祖親鸞聖人が顕かにされた仏法の教えをしっかりと聴聞し続けて参りましょう。

お寺ニュース

ペット追悼法要

来る2月13日(日)午前10時よりペット追悼法要を開催いたします。法要では日曜日学校の子ども達が亡きペットの写真や絵などを持ちより追悼ペットを詠みます。動物のいのちからいのちの尊さ、他者のいのちと共にいきることを学びます。皆様もご一色に参りください。

お寺家族リトリート

本年の家族リトリートは2月18日(金)〜20日(日)に恒例通りサンルイスオビスポ西本願寺にて開催いたします。本年は洗心仏教会の小谷政雄師をお招きし、菩萨精神（心に）ついてお話をお願いしております。サンルイスオビスポは丁度ロスとサンフランシスコの中間点にある場所でお寺は山間地に立てられ自然に囲まれ静かかな研修に至り得た場です。また近くには温泉もあり、お寺に滞在しない参加者はこのアビラ温泉やそのモーテル、ホテルにも宿泊可能です。日常をはなれ仏法にただ耳を傾けるよい機会です。どうぞお誘いの上ご参加ください。詳しくは河和田開教使までお尋ねください。626-913-0622
February
3  7:30 pm  Howakai Japanese Service
6  8:30 am  Board Meeting
6  10:00 am  Shotsuki Service/Nirvana Day Service
8  10:00 am  Bonbu Class
13  10:00 am  Sunday Service/Pets Memorial Service
18-20  WCBT Family Retreat
20  No Sunday Service
22  10:00 am  Bonbu Class
27  10:00 am  Sunday Service

March
3  7:30 pm  Howakai Japanese Service
6  8:30 am  Board Meeting
6  10:00 am  Shotsuki Service
8  10:00 am  Bonbu Class
13  10:00 am  Sunday Service
13  4:30 pm  Ohigan Service
19  12:00 am  Cherry Blossom Festival
22  10:00 am  Bonbu Class
26  8:00 pm  Oldies Dance
27  10:00 am  Sunday Service@Betsuin