



Kodo Topics



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Guiding Principles for 2024

Through the Practices *Shamatha-Vipassana* and Benefitting Others

Let us Cultivate Wisdom and Compassion

To Fulfill the Mission of the Bodhisattva Sangha

President Rev. Shojun Okano

Living in Harmony

The Mission of the Bodhisattva

The guiding principle for 2024 is essentially the same as last year: “Let us practice *Shamatha-Vipassana* and benefitting others, develop wisdom and compassion, and fulfil the mission of the Bodhisattva Sangha.” This year, we hope to walk with you in accordance with these guidelines.

Now that the coronal disaster is coming to an end, the planet and humanity are facing an even more serious crisis. Extreme weather events caused by climate change are claiming lives and destroying towns and villages. Conflicts and wars are occurring one after another, costing many lives, destroying communities, and increasing the number of refugees. Furthermore, economic disparities between and within countries are widening. Under these circumstances, the international community is becoming more divided instead of moving towards co-operation.

What can we as bodhisattvas do in such times? Bodhisattvas have the mission to practice a “harmonious way of life” themselves and to transmit this way of life to society at large. A “harmonious way of life” involves a variety of practices, such as: respecting peace; valuing morality and equality; defending human rights and diversity; caring for the global environment; wishing for the happiness and freedom from suffering of all humanity; and being willing to cooperate with the various peoples of the world to build a harmonious society by overcoming our differences.

The Teaching of Dependent Origination

We usually think of ourselves and others as completely separate entities. In reality, however, we are more connected to ourselves and others than we realize, and there are no clear boundaries.

In Buddhism, there is the teaching of Dependent Origination (Skt. *pratitya samutpada*, Jp. *en-gi*). It

means that all phenomena “arise and cease through causal conditions”. Everything exists as a result of causal relationship with each other. Human beings live by various kinds of causal connections and relationships, so no one person is independent.

Furthermore, the teaching of Dependent Origination shows that the earth on which we live is one great life, organically connecting humans, plants, animals, and the natural environment. The earth is also organically connected to the life of the universe.

The Practice of Benefitting Others

However, human self-centeredness brings disharmony to this organic union. Self-centeredness blinds us to our connection with others and with greater life. It makes us feel as if we are isolated and under constant threat. This leads to insecurity and an excessive desire to protect oneself, while others become completely out of our sight.

A self-centered mind is preoccupied only with itself. This mind is hard, narrow, and inward-looking; preoccupied with its own anguish, problems, desires, anger, anxiety, frustration, pride and self-image.

The practice of benefitting others in this year’s guidelines involves softening, expanding, and enriching that mind. Benefitting others is the practice of letting go of self-centeredness and giving what goodness you have to others. You have much to give, such as compassion, kindness, and warmth. The practice of benefitting others is to be aware of these things and to express them in action.

We can begin to practice benefitting others by not thinking only about ourselves and turning our attention to the heart-minds of those close to us and, more broadly, to the suffering of human beings in general. To look at others is to broaden our narrowed minds. Caring for others means softening the hardened heart. When the mind is broadened and softened, the connection between oneself and one’s surroundings becomes visible.

Upon doing so, you realize that you are not isolated. You also realize that you are not the only one suffering. Compassion arises and grows from such realization.

The Practice of *Shamatha-Vipassana*

We all wish to be happy and not to suffer. However, we create a lot of suffering ourselves because of the wanderings of our minds. We get caught up in past events, worry unnecessarily about the future, overthink, get swept up in our emotions, deny ourselves, or are never satisfied with anything we do.

The way to cease this wandering is the practice of *shamatha-vipassana* mentioned in this year’s guidelines. *Shamatha* means concentrating the mind on a specific object, ceasing the mind process from wandering and then making it calm. The most basic method is to become aware of one’s breathing and physical sensations. *Vipassana* means observing things as they are with that calmed mind. Calming and stabilizing the mind brings about the process of wisdom.

If you can look within yourself with equanimity, you will realize that thoughts and feelings are transient and that what arises will eventually cease. When you practice *shamatha-vipassana*, you will be able to consciously distance yourself from various thoughts and feelings that arise, and before you know it, you will no longer be driven by them.

Let us all work together this year to practice benefitting others and *shamatha-vipassana*!

Kodosan Flower Festival (*Hanamatsuri*)

The Kodosan Flower Festival was held in 2024 from April 1 to 7 under the theme of “Flower Festival to convey the message of peace”. The festival has resumed for the second time in person after the Covid 19 pandemic outbreak. As a Day of Welfare and a Children’s Festival, the ceremonial bathing of the baby Buddha statue with scented water at the entrance to the main hall was a central event. Temple members devised various ways to convey the significance of the Buddha’s birth to visitors to Kodosan. The Flower Festival Children’s Festival was held earlier on March 24 at the main Buddha Hall. Seventy children of elementary school age and younger attended the event to celebrate the birth of Buddha and learn the importance of compassion. They enjoyed playing games and having fun at the Children’s Festival.



The *Kambutsu* Ceremony officiated by President Shojun Okano & Vice President Karen Okano



Children pouring tea over the Buddha



The Flower Dance based in Thai traditional dance

On April 7, various performances were presented online, connecting the main hall and each of the branch temples in other parts of Japan. At the Aomori branch temple, the Ka-ze troupe made a live performance of “Summer in Tsugaru” and dedicated their dance to the people in Ishikawa prefecture suffering from the New Year’s earthquake. The congregation from Shizuoka also took up the challenge this year of a live broadcast, performing “Yaizu, a Good Place”, which is a delightful lyric filled with the dialect, places of interest, and specialities unique to Yaizu City. The Tohoku branch temple of Yamagata

produced a video of the “Swallow Dance” from NHK’s “Songs for Everyone” and added a little Yamagata flavor to it. The Fukushima branch temple produced a video called “Aquamarine Fukushima” to celebrate the culture of the ocean there and their dream for revival of the community. In the main Buddha Hall in Yokohama, the Kodosan Boys & Girls Scouts, who celebrated the 61st anniversary of their troop this year, performed the color guard drum corps. There was also another amazing performance of the Flower Dance members in Thai traditional form.



Local folk song from Aomori



Hand-made Buddha float for world peace



Maitri Movement Principles

Kodosan Photo Album #1



the main hall of Kodosan Temple glows with the first rays of the New Year's Day



January 15, 2023: Kodosan’s coming-of-age ceremony: with the eldest son of President Okano, Kensho Okano



January 1-3: the Hall of the Buddha Relics was specially opened to the public

Spreading the Work of Buddhist based Suicide Prevention, Psychotherapy, and Chaplaincy to Other Parts of Asia

3 Events in Thailand in late September, 2023

Since 2017, the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) @ Kodosan, under the leadership of President Shojun Okano has been working with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) to develop a series of conferences and workshops on the wide field of Buddhism and mental health, including suicide prevention, Buddhist chaplaincy, and Buddhist psychotherapy.

Our international working group welcomed 2023 and the lifting of most Covid restrictions around the world with work towards its first face-to-face international meeting since 2019. This work included welcoming new member-practitioners to our monthly zoom meetings as we attempted to build a participant list for the 3 activities planned for Thailand in late September. These new participants have both widened the scope of our learning and work as well as deepening it in the areas already under investigation. While the group has re-affirmed its core intention to focus on 1) the problem of suicide, it has expanded its focus in two other major areas: 2) the intersection between modern, predominantly Western, psychotherapy & Buddhist teachings and practice, 3) the cultivation and training of Buddhist monastics and laypersons as counselors and chaplains. These three areas became the platform for creating three events in Thailand from September 24-October 1, 2023.

Public Symposium: Developing Buddhist Psychotherapy:

Overcoming Contradictions in Psychotherapeutic & Spiritual Development

September 24 from 14:00-17:30 at the Buddhadasa Indapanno Archives (BIA), Bangkok

In Buddhism, the goal of the path is clearly envisioned as *nirvana*. In modern psychotherapy, however, what is the ultimate goal of all our efforts? Is it a healthy sense of self? Is it to lessen the burden or power of the ego? Many people today both East and West are exploring the potentials of harmonizing modern psychotherapy and Buddhism. However, if their ultimate goals are divergent, can they really complement each other? The Buddha's goal was not to just solve our problems but to connect them and our *dukkha* to spiritual goals. Buddhist psychotherapy thus seeks to develop a spiritual path out of worldly suffering to something greater, even the meaning of death. With such an orientation, modern psychotherapy can become more holistic and go beyond the focus on short term behavioral goals or the rather unclear longer-term goals of a well-adjusted ego. This symposium sought to offer ideas and perspectives on this topic. The panel of expert practitioners described methods and techniques for bridging from the psychotherapeutic to the spiritual, such as the kinds of language, tools, and conversations employed.



It was led by Dr. Prawate Tantipiwatanaskul (Thailand), a leading practitioner in the art of harmonizing modern psychotherapy and Buddhism in Thailand and a member of this group since 2017. The three panelists responding to Dr. Prawate's talk were also original members of the group and offered a global perspective on the topic: Prof. Elaine Yuen (U.S.A.) former Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Chair of the Master of Divinity Program at Naropa University; Rev. Gustav Ericsson a Lutheran priest from Sweden with a background in Soto Zen practice who works as a chaplain in hospitals and suicide prevention centers; and Rev. Masazumi Shojun Okano (Japan), founder of the project and INEB Advisory Board member;. The goal of this symposium as an event open to the public was to share with wider audiences some of the cutting-edge perspectives on how Buddhism is deepening our understanding of psychotherapy and also how modern psychotherapeutic tools may provide a door to access traditional teachings and practices of Buddhism.

International Conference:

3rd International Conference on International Buddhist Psychotherapy and Suicide Prevention

September 26-27 at the INEB Office in Bangkok

Following our international conferences in 2017 in Japan and 2019 in Thailand, the group held its third such intensive conference for expert practitioners in this field. 19 participants joined from the U.S., Sweden, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Thailand. As practitioners, this conference did not offer long presentations on various topics. In fact, such presentations have been a feature of the over 20 monthly zoom meetings held by the group during the Covid pandemic. In this way, the group was highly focused on areas that it wished for deeper and more interactive sharing. As such, the two-day conference resembled more an intensive workshop of participants sharing various practices they use in the professional work and personal lives.

#1: Walking Meditation (*kinhin*) in the Japanese Soto Zen tradition for gathering strength and balancing oneself to be able to face other people with problems.

#2: The Science & Art of Happiness for teaching the principles and techniques of meditation together with the practice of self-compassion for common people in simple terms.

#3: Meditation for those with advanced cancer for offering guided meditation followed by council practice with an emphasis on equanimity (*upeksā*) practices.

#4: Buddhist based suicide prevention for incorporating the Four Reminders into both individual work and systems work for those suffering from non-suicidal self-harm and suicide ideation to establish relational compassion for oneself and others.

#5: Buddhist based counseling for introducing the Open-Focus method for stabilizing a helper or a chaplain and the six steps of Eugene Gendlin's Focusing Therapy.

#6 Maitri Space Awareness for introducing and exploring the innovative Buddhist psychotherapeutic practice created by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. This last workshop encompassed almost the entire second day of the conference and all participants engaged in it.



Workshop & Training:

Concepts & Practices in Chaplaincy: 3-day Workshop for Buddhist Caregivers

September 29-October 1 at Wongsanit Ashram

This workshop provided experiential training in Buddhist chaplaincy for the first time in a Southeast and South Asian context. While chaplaincy and Buddhist chaplaincy in particular is well established in the West and also emerged in East Asia, very few programs are available for direct study in the rest of Asia. This three-day workshop presented the principles of Buddhist chaplaincy and also offered certain key skills and practices to enable committed practitioners (ordained or lay) to serve as caregivers for those experiencing the wide variety of suffering in today's society. Much of this suffering appears as depression, mental ill health, and suicidal ideation, yet emerges from trauma associated with study & work stress, gender and sexual identity, family trauma, social violence, tragic accidents, etc. The workshop was led by a team of seven practitioners from the two-day conference held in Bangkok. There were 21 participants largely drawn from the INEB network coming from Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam. They ranged from monastics who run temple schools to lay practitioners studying psychotherapy and counseling. Concerns ranged from dealing with war trauma to domestic abuse, suicide, and burnout in the caring professions.

Using an innovative Buddhist model using the 5 aggregates (*skandhas*), the workshop led participants through a three-day process:

- 1) Skillful Means and Acts of Translation on the Path of Care
- 2) Mindfulness of the Body in Chaplaincy, Counseling and Being with Suffering
- 3) Integrating Buddhist Mindfulness & Western Psychotherapy
- 4) Maitri and Metta: Dynamic Aspects of Attunement and Compassion
- 5) Counseling Role Plays
- 6) Introduction to Buddhist Counseling and Chaplaincy around the World



Further details on these three meetings as well as plans for 2024 and beyond will be offered in a separate report and posted on the group's url:

<https://jnec.net/activities/dyingcar/suicide-prevention/buddhist-psychotherapy-and-suicide-prevention/>

Engaged Buddhism in Japan:
Historical Perspectives & Contemporary Exemplars

by Jonathan S. Watts

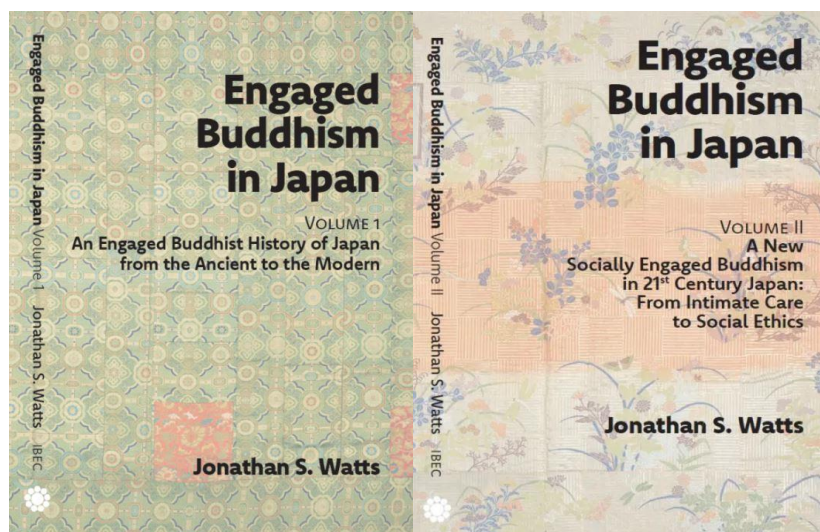
International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) @ Kodosan

Vol I: An Engaged Buddhist History of Japan from the Ancient to the Modern

***Vol. II: A New Socially Engaged Buddhism in 21st Century Japan:
 From Intimate Care to Social Ethics***

These volumes offer a unique perspective outside of the normal scholarly or sectarian historical presentations of Japanese Buddhism. Volume I uses a socially engaged Buddhist lens to examine key themes in the development of Buddhism in Japan, particularly in their socio-political context. The latter half of this volume then charts the struggles of modern Japanese Buddhists to develop a socially engaged perspective and practice amidst the trials and tribulations of modernity, imperialism, war, and postwar economic boom. As such, Volume I offers the critical historical perspectives for understanding contemporary Japanese Buddhism, which so many in Asia and elsewhere find incomprehensible with priests who marry, drink, and live largely secular lives.

Out of the distortions of modernity, Volume II offers a series of contemporary case studies of Socially Engaged Buddhist priests (both male and female), who are redefining Japanese Buddhism and perhaps even Japanese society in the 21st century. Since the Japanese economy began to falter in the 1990s, Buddhist priests have begun to come out of their temples and their once lucrative Funeral Buddhism activities to engage directly in the suffering of the common people. Volume II offers an intimate look into this work in the areas of end-of-life care, suicide prevention, disaster trauma and chaplaincy, poverty and homelessness, and anti-nuclear activism and Buddhist development, with an Afterword on gender as a neglected area of engagement. This second volume is the culmination of over sixteen years of participatory research by the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship in Yokohama.



Western printing through the Sumeru Press

Endorsements:

Volume II: “This revelatory book sheds a whole new light on Buddhism in Japan, a Buddhism that is socially engaged, brave, and totally surprising. This is a must-read for all of us. The writing is bright and clear; the research deep and thorough; the characters in the book are profoundly memorable.” *Roshi Joan Jiko Halifax, founder Upaya Zen Center and Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program*

Volume I: “I have spent my life interacting with many of the Japanese progressives and Socially Engaged Buddhists written about in this volume. Watts has a deep appreciation and understanding of their important role in Japanese society, and so this volume is an important contribution. It also helps many of us outside of Japan to come to terms with and appreciate Japan’s unique style of laicized Buddhism.” *Sulak Sivaraksa, leading founder, International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)*

Volume I: “This ambitious book is an attempt to look through the history of Socially Engaged Buddhism in Japan and to identify and clarify various contemporary social issues connected to it. Watts’ review of the history of Buddhism since ancient times in light of trends in Socially Engaged Buddhism in the modern world is deeply significant. Although Socially Engaged Buddhism in modern Japan appears to be less prominent, a review of the history of Japanese Buddhism as a whole, and especially the history

of modern Japanese Buddhism, will make current issues more understandable. I hope that this book will stimulate discussion about Buddhist social ethics and particularly the social ethics of Japanese Buddhism.” *Susumu Shimazono, Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University and leading scholar on Japanese religion in the modern era.*

Published by Sumeru Books (Canada) and available through Amazon and most major outlets in the West and Japan. In South and Southeast Asia, a special printing by the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in Bangkok will make the volume available at reduced cost in this region only.

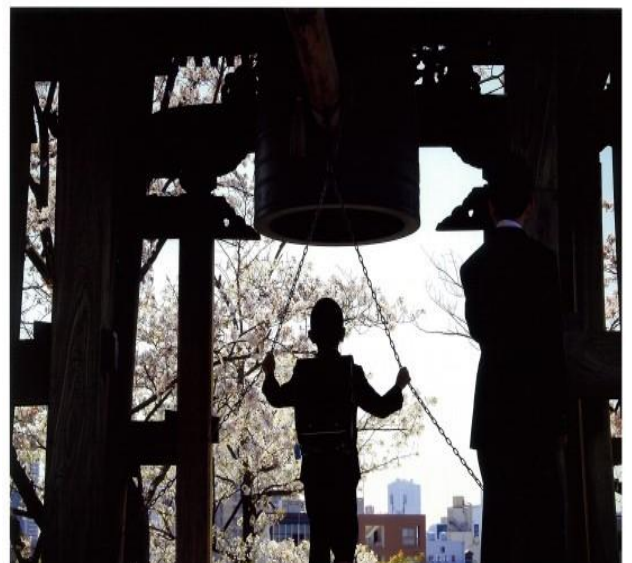


Asian Printing through INEB

Kodosan Photo Album #2



April 16, 2023: a concert of Yamato Music held at the National Theatre where the 2nd Vice-President, Rinko Okano, performed the song “The Way of the Bodhisattva & the Young Ascetic (Sessen Doji)”.



May 9, 2023: This photo, “The Wish for Peace”, was selected as the winner of the Kodosan Flower Festival Photo Contest