



## 【Phenomenon is a reflection of our heart and mind】

March is considered “early spring,” but, lately, I have to admit feeling slightly affected by the impact of climate change. During mid-February in New York, we experienced the chill of  $-17^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $1.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). It was truly cold. Then two days later, the temperature rose to the warmth of  $10^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $50^{\circ}\text{F}$ )! That was quite astonishing! Everyone, how are you faring amid such extreme daily fluctuation of temperature?

This month, I would like to share a story about how Venerable Kātyāyana (Maha-Katyayana), one of the ten principal disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, liberated an elderly woman.

Venerable Kātyāyana, who was born in Avanti, the ancient kingdom in southern India, had accumulated so much practice that he was included as one of the ten principal disciples of Shakyamuni. He conducted dissemination in his home state and was continuously expounding the teachings.

One day, as Venerable Kātyāyana approached the banks of a certain river, he heard a woman crying out loud. When he looked intently between the trees, he saw an elderly woman squatting down by the water and sobbing. He went down to the waterfront and asked, “What is making you so sad that you are crying by the river?”

The elderly woman, looked up and stared at the Venerable Kātyāyana and eventually started to speak. She was a servant working for the town’s very wealthy man. Although her prosperous master had amassed treasures that practically filled the storehouse to its limits, he was a cruel and stingy person.

“For me, every single day is hell. Before the sun rises until middle of the night, I am whipped and forced to work hard like horses and cows. Even with food, I am never fed well. But I am without kin, so I have no choice but to work for this family. I have repeatedly thought it would be so much better to die, but I couldn’t even do that.”

The elderly woman said: she was ordered by the wealthy man to carry a heavy jug and came to this river to fetch water. When she saw her image on the water, she felt helpless, broke down and cried. Wistful feeling of “old age” must have spurred on her sorrow. Eventually, she would not be able to move her body as she wished and would not be able to avert facing the impending “death.” Overcome with tears, her shoulders shaking, she could not help but be crushed with despair of no longer having anyone she could rely on.

Venerable Kātyāyana, who had been closely watching over her, said something strange.

“Dear old lady, if you resent your poverty that much, why don’t sell off that poverty? You can sell off poverty if you’d like.” The elderly woman immediately said, “Is that true? I would gladly sell it off. How can I do that?”

“Do exactly as I say. First, wash and purify your body in the river flow. Then, next, you must do donation.” The elderly woman closed her eyes sadly and said, “That is impossible to do for someone like me who has no assets at all.” Venerable Kātyāyana said, “Draw a brimful of clean water from the river into this jug.”

When the elderly woman finished collecting the water, he slowly explained to her.

“It is the Buddha who will buy your poverty. Just as you had washed and purified your body with the clean water, wash and purify your heart and mind from today by vowing to never feel hatred toward the wealthy man any more. And it is also important to become determined to work as hard as you possibly can to serve the wealthy man.” The elderly woman said “Yes,” and nodded deeply.

Venerable Kātyāyana said, “From tonight, after everyone is sound asleep, pray to the Buddha wholeheartedly, let go of evil thoughts and sleep peacefully. The Buddha is always protecting you.” He





then went away, leaving her with those concluding words.

The elderly woman prostrated and put her palms together toward his retreating figure. She vowed in her heart, “From now on, no matter how difficult it may be, no matter what may happen, I will no longer hate and begrudge the wealthy man. I will give my best effort to work as hard as I can to carry out my duties.”

And then, behold. An indescribable feeling of abundance started to spread within her heart.

Thereafter, in a corner of the master’s house, the elderly woman fell asleep with a peaceful smile on her face and breathed her last. Such peaceful natural death as the elderly woman’s is noted in the sutra as being “reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven (*Tohriten*).”

Venerable Kātyāyana was praised as “foremost in explaining the Dharma” among the disciples of Shakyamuni and thus there are many stories that depict how well he understands Shakyamuni’s teachings. He was able to guide the elderly woman from despair to the path of liberation with just, “You can sell off your poverty.” This must be his compassion • wisdom that arose from his feeling of unity with the elderly woman who shares the same life of the Buddha with him. He thus considered her distress as his own suffering.

If “we can sell off our poverty” then we can also say that “we are buying our poverty.” We all, without exception, do not like being poor • to suffer, of course. But with our immediate greed and anger, as well as our complaints when things do not go as we wish, do we not find ourselves unconsciously “buying” a mountain full of poverty and feeling trapped? The one and only path that allows us to find our way out is to yearn for the Buddha’s teachings, and when we do that, we will instantly be liberated from our suffering.

This is what Venerable Kātyāyana had taught.

Furthermore, there is one more point that needs to be emphasized. We are told that instantly after the elderly woman, who had been encouraged by Venerable Kātyāyana to purify her heart and mind, vowed to put it into practice in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, she felt an indescribable feeling of abundance start to spread and fill her heart and mind. Yet, not a thing had changed in the world of phenomena. Thus, it is just by changing how we see and think, we can personally feel true liberation within us.

Gassho  
New York Center Minister  
Etsuko Fujita

### *Topic for February*

#### < Realization Through Special Sutra Chanting Practice During the Coldest Season >

It was two years ago. The role of Administrative Director I had been assigned for 15 years was appointed and handed over to Yuri Sugino, and I was officially appointed a new role as Chief of the Center. Thereafter, however, because I had the previous role for so long, the shift of responsibility made me feel sad and a hollow gap started to develop in my heart and mind. There was a part of me that could not give full attention to the new role as Chief of the Center.

It was during the Special Chanting Practice. I shared the emptiness I felt in my heart in a Hoza. Rev. Fujita said: “You certainly worked hard taking on a major role for such a long time. The Buddha is quite aware of the merit you have accumulated. Furthermore, many people also appreciate you. From now, however, it is important for you to devote your practice to become a buddha through the role of Chief of the Center.”

To be honest, when Rev. Fujita acknowledged me, great joy started to seep into my heart. Simultaneously, I started to see myself as someone who had persevered and put my best effort in the role. Instinctively, I found myself praising myself thinking, “Yoshi, you did good, you worked hard.”

Whichever role one may have, each of us is walking the path to become a Buddha through that respective role. Whenever I think that, joy radiates within me all over again. On the last day of the Special Practice, while chanting the Sutra of Meditation, a passage caught my attention. To paraphrase, it said “various phenomena all arise from our delusions and illusions.” I became aware of how I was consumed by past, thinking it is this and that, just blowing up my delusions and illusions. I had been holding onto these thoughts for quite a while. I think it was because we were in the midst of the Special Chanting Practice, that I was able to openly and honestly express my feelings, and consider that a compassionate protection by the Buddha. It was when I was finally able to acknowledge my own self that I had a change of heart. I became someone who can face and advance forward.

I am thankful and full of gratitude by the merit I received through the practice of chanting the entire Threefold Lotus Sutra with the Special Practice during the Coldest Season.

Yoshi





1/31(Sun) Special Practice of the L.S. Chanting .



2/3 (Wed) Setsubun-e



2/11(Thu) Monthly Memorial Service

2/7 (Sun) Sunday Service  
Testmonial : Yoshi Iimura  
Eiko Naito  
Interpreter : Yasuko Vendley  
MC : Joh Ishikane



2/14 (Sun) Nirvana Day Service  
Testmonial : Yuka Kageyama  
Testmonial : Yasuko Vendley  
Speech : Rev. Etsuko Fujita



# SCHEDULE FOR NEW YORK CHAPTER

## March 2016

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		<b>1</b> <b>First Day of Month</b> 2-4PM Chapter Leaders' Meeting 6pm Meditation	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> <b>9AM</b> <b>Memorial Service for Founder</b> 創立記念日	<b>5</b> Closed Dharma Practices at home
<b>6</b> 1PM Sunday Svc President Dharma Talk	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b> 9AM Memorial Service for Co-Founder	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b> Closed Dharma Practices at home
<b>13</b> 1PM Sunday Service Study Session	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> 9AM The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni Day 2-4PM Chapter Leaders' Meeting 6pm Meditation	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b> Closed Dharma Practices at home
<b>20</b> 10:30AM Board Meeting 1PM Annual Meeting	<b>21</b> 10AM Spring-time Higan-e (Special Memorial Service)	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">                         The First time Leader Seminar                     </div>	<b>26</b> Closed
<b>27</b> Closed	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>		