



The True Joy of Awakening

Taiko & Buddhism with Rev. Masao Kodani

BWA, obon, board meetings and taiko--what do the four have in common? According to Rev. Masao Kodani, resident minister at Senshin Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles, these are temple activities where we are given opportunities to *confront*, rather than *indulge* our ego. For this reason, in 1969 Rev. Kodani co-founded Kinnara Taiko at Senshin. Named after an Indian deity of music, Kinnara Taiko uses music to engage people in the Buddha Dharma. It was the first Japanese American taiko group and became a model for countless other groups in San Jose, Ogden, Denver, Chicago, and Hawai'i.

In November, PBA and the Hawai'i Betsuin Dharma School taiko group, had the special privilege of hosting Rev. Kodani for two evening taiko workshops—one for students and the other for adults. Students sang and played new drumming patterns. Rev. Kodani reminded the students that taiko is “70% visual” and taught them an exercise that forced them to “open up” and make big motions.



Rev. Mas Kodani tutoring PBA students Kristi Shinsato '08 (top) and Chelsea Toyama '07.

At the end of the two hour-long workshops, PBA students took away a range of lessons. “I liked the way the new patterns sounded,” said freshman Kai Gilding. Fellow freshman Tyler Sugimoto appreciated how “Rev. Mas explained how to play properly as a group; you have to play as one, not as individuals.” Junior Kristi Shinsato recalled, “I stopped thinking about how to play and just went with the flow of motion.”

On the other hand, the workshop brought familiar frustrations to the surface for PBA taiko Sensei Jay Toyofuku. “I wholeheartedly agree with almost everything Rev. Mas said about taiko and Buddhism,” said Toyofuku. “The problem for me has always been putting into practice the things you know intellectually. I think this is the real challenge of Buddhism. I feel it is a simple and practical religion, but one must constantly *practice* in order to grow.”



PBA taiko sensei, Jay Toyofuku and the freshmen taiko class perform a piece for Rev. Kodani.

And herein lay the crux of the lesson. By combining lecture with drumming, Rev. Kodani intended to create conditions where workshop participants could experience, rather than understand, the Dharma. “Whether you are playing to show off or are embarrassed because you don’t know what you’re doing, *play!*” Rev. Kodani instructed. “When you do, something happens--you reach a point where the playing is effortless, where you let go of your ego and are one with the moment.” As brief as it is, says Rev. Kodani, this experience that dissipates the moment one recognizes it’s happening, is *horaku*—the joy in the Dharma, the true joy of awakening.

To read an excellent overview of Buddhist taiko, go to: http://www.vbtemple.org/dharmarain/dr12_tai.htm