

Calmness & Insight

Having observed our 20th anniversary of Saishin Dojo, our month of July 8 hour a day program for 1st through 6th graders, we have seen two generations of Buddhist children grow up in America.

The Saishin Dojo teachers are public school teachers who are also affiliated with Buddhist temples in Southern California. Thus part of the day is spent in teaching a child what he or she will be covering in public school. The rest of the day is spent in morning omairi in which the children are taught to lead the chanting, learning Bon Odori, sitting and walking meditation, making tsukemono, sushi, udon, tofu, ikebana, chigirie, sumie, origami, haiku, pottery, flute, taiko, crafts, tie dye, manju, short trips to a swimming pool, Little Tokyo, a movie, and this year a trip to the San Diego Zoo. It is a full and mutually rewarding program held every July.

One of the things we have observed over the years is the plummeting decrease in attention span of the children. This reflects the general population and is a serious matter of concern. In an age of instant information and gratification, it has become increasingly difficult to teach the calmness and quiet in which insight is seated. We have noticed an increased "figityness" during sitting and walking meditation and an alarming inability to simply sit still and immobile for more than 30 seconds. I have been told by educators that the attention span of students over the past

15 years has dropped from 3 minutes to 30 seconds. This is probably true for adults as well. Just watch what passes for news programs on TV and you will be hard pressed to find any news bite over 30 seconds – and this largely limited to movies and movie stars, killings and accidents, and the weather. Is it any wonder then that the average American knows virtually nothing about the rest of the world, while the rest of the world knows all to well what America is about?

We have tried to emphasize the chanting and other meditative traditions of Buddhism to our children and the chanting is by far the most successful. In four short weeks, Saishin Dojo kids chant and lead the chanting in the Sambujo, Shishinrai, Juseige, Shijuhachigan, Nembutsu, Shiku Nembutsu, and two versions of Ekoku – and most of this is learned by 1st graders who cannot yet read – they listen and absorb without a calculating mind. The quieting and emptying of the monkey mind is crucial. Like the proverbial teacup filled to the brim, there is little to learn and understand when we are full of ourselves or full of what the self conceives to be the "reality out there." Don't just do something, stand there!

Gassho,

Rev. Mas