

Life's Ingredients Gladys Fujiuchi

Before we start practicing BJ's gathas, I would like to share some of the literature from my files.

This article is from the book "Who Ordered This Truckload of Dung?" by Ajahn Brahm, born as Peter Betts, a Buddhist monk in Australia who shares the Dharma in his own unique style. The piece I will share with you is titled the law of karma.

"Most WESTERNERS misunderstand the law of karma. They mistake it for fatalism, where one is doomed to suffer for some unknown crime in a forgotten past life. This is not quite so, as this story will show.

Two women were each baking a cake. The first woman had miserable ingredients. The old white flour had to have the green mold bits removed first. The cholesterol enriched butter was almost going rancid. She had to pick the brown lumps out of the white sugar (because someone had put in a spoon wet with coffee), and the only fruit she had were ancient raisins, as hard as depleted uranium. And her kitchen was of the style called "pre-World War" - which World War was a matter of debate.

The second woman had the very best of ingredients. The organically grown whole-wheat flour was guaranteed GM-free. She had trans-fat-free canola-oil spread, raw sugar, and succulent fruit grown in her own garden. And her kitchen was "state-of-the-art," with every modern gadget. Which woman baked the more delicious cake?

It is often not the person with the best ingredients who bakes the better cake—there is more to baking a cake than just the ingredients. Sometimes the person with miserable ingredients puts so much effort, care, and love into their baking that their cake comes out the most delicious of all. It is what we do with the ingredients that counts.

I (Ajahn Brahm) have some friends who have had miserable ingredients to work with in this life: they were born into poverty, possibly abused as children, not clever at school, maybe disabled and unable to play sports. But the few qualities they did have they put together so well that they baked a mightily impressive cake. I admire them greatly. Do you recognize such people?

I have other friends who have had wonderful ingredients to work with in this life. Their families were wealthy and loving, they were successful in school, talented athletes, good looking, and popular, and yet they wasted their young lives with drugs or alcohol. Do you recognize such a one?

Half of karma is the ingredients we have got to work with. The other half, the most crucial part, is what we make of them in this life." —end of Ajahn's article.

And that takes me to the next point—Japanese Eyes American Heart III which are stories told by 17 Ni-sei of their own experiences of hardship, and how they have turned their lives around into productive and meaningful lives. Their names you will recognize—David Iha, Yoshiaki Fujitani, Shimeji Kanazawa, Fujio Matsuda, Rose Nakamura, Richard Kosaki and others. They were involved in the educational, governmental, political, business and social landscape and left a lasting legacy for us. And for us ordinary folk, we can "bake a better cake" also by how we live our lives - with

effort, care, respect and kindness.

Now, we can apply the same principle to BJ's gathas. In them we can feel the love and feelings that she put into them as she was creating them. Our job is to convey those feelings as we sing them.