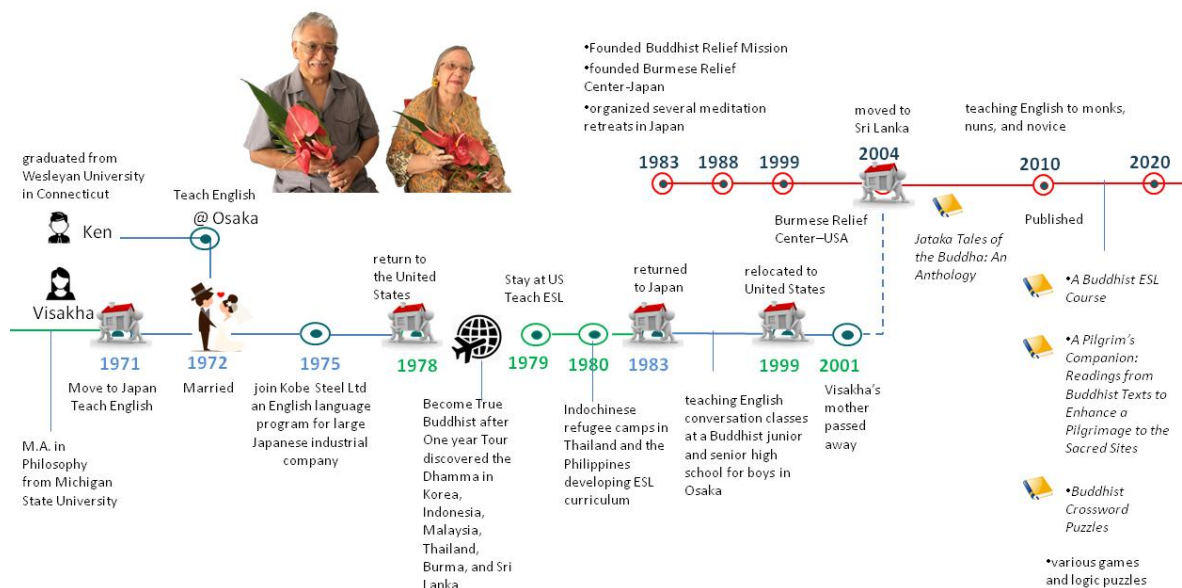


A Biographical Sketch of Ken and Visakha Kawasaki



Visakha graduated from Oakland University in Michigan with a major in Philosophy. She spent three years with the United States Peace Corps in the Philippines, two years as a resource person and teacher trainer for English language programs for provincial schools and one year teaching philosophy at Mindanao State University. She received an M.A. in Philosophy from Michigan State University in 1971. Then she moved to Japan to begin teaching English.

Ken graduated from Wesleyan University in Connecticut with a major in French. After teaching French in a high school for a few months, he moved to Japan to begin teaching English at a junior high school in Tokyo. After two years at that school, he transferred to Osaka to teach English in Osaka, which is where he met Visakha, who was in the same program.

They worked together, teaching adult students and organizing activities for learning English through social gatherings for four years. In 1975, they left that company to join Kobe Steel, Ltd. to establish an English language program for that large Japanese industrial company, which was building a steel plant in Qatar. For three years, they taught English to both factory and office workers who were directly involved with the Qatar project. They also advised the company on many cross-cultural issues which arose from the interactions between the Qatari, Egyptian, and Pakistani trainees with their Japanese counterparts.

In 1978, they left Japan to return to the United States. This trip lasted one year and took them through much of Asia and Europe. It was during this journey that they discovered the Dhamma in Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka. In India, they visited various Buddhist sites, and it was at Sanchi that they realized that they were, indeed, Buddhist.

They stayed in the United States for one year, during which time Visakha was employed to manage a community program to involve parents in local schools, and Ken taught ESL to newly arrived Indochinese refugees. They also began organizing the many photographs from their travels, which ten years later coalesced into “Strive On With Diligence: The Buddha and His Teaching,” a 90-minute video with almost 300 photographs, available at

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdZhaf8RJE&t=718s>> and on DVD.

For almost two years, Ken and Visakha worked in Indochinese refugee camps in Thailand and the Philippines developing ESL curriculum, creating materials, and advising and training teachers in a US State Department program for Hmong, Vietnamese, Lowland Lao, and Cambodian refugees being resettled in the United States.

In 1983, they returned to Japan to begin teaching English conversation classes at a Buddhist junior and senior high school for boys in Osaka. They held that job for sixteen years. During that time they established Buddhist Relief Mission, a small organization supporting various projects in many different countries. They also founded Burmese Relief Center-Japan, which assisted the students of 8-8-88, monks of the All Burma Young Monks’ Union, and refugees in camps along the Thai/Burma border. During this time they spent several months each year in Thailand, visiting refugee camps, offering assistance to various projects, and learning about Buddhism. Until 1988, they also made frequent trips to Burma. They meditated twice at Mahasi Center in Rangoon. They also organized several meditation retreats in Japan for Ven. U Khe Min Da, a Mahathera and a student of Mahasi Sayadaw, resident in Japan from 1956.

In 1999, they relocated to the United States to care for Visakha’s elderly mother, who passed away in 2001. They stayed in Michigan, continuing their work in Burmese Relief Center–USA and Buddhist Relief Mission, by resettling several Burmese refugee families, supporting local Lao, Thai, and Sri Lankan temples, as well as helping to organize Michigan Citizens for Peace, opposing the Iraq War.

In 2004, they moved to Sri Lanka, where they were able to finish , after nearly 25 years of work, *Jataka Tales of the Buddha: An Anthology*, which was published by in 2010 by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, and later by Buddhist Cultural Centre, Dehiwala. These stories, based on the original Pali, have been retold in natural English to make them lively and accessible to the modern reader, but still faithful to the Dhamma. In Sri Lanka, Ken and Visakha soon became involved with teaching English to monks, nuns, and novices. There are many foreign monks and nuns taking courses in Buddhist studies at Peradeniya University, near Kandy. Some of these students asked Ken and Visakha to help them with their English, and they organized a weekly class. This class continued for about 15 years, until the pandemic began, but enrollment constantly changed as students completed their university studies, and new students arrived. There were three main components in the syllabus. One was *Jataka Tales of the Buddha* and other Buddhist stories. After reading the stories, students completed exercises which covered vocabulary and an understanding of the content. The second was various games and logic puzzles, helping the students to develop critical thinking. Some of the activities were based on current events, such as pollution, climate catastrophe, and war. A third component was a textbook, *Merit: A Buddhist ESL Course*. This textbook, of which 21 lessons have been completed, is based on a pilgrimage to the Buddhist sacred sites by a group of six pilgrims—two Americans, students from Japan, Thailand, and France, and a British artist. The lessons, each of which begins with a dialog in very natural conversational English, describe many features of the sites and explore various

Buddhist concepts, such as paticca sammupada and death meditation. Some of the lessons also offer a glimpse of the different traditions of Buddhism—Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. There are a few grammatical exercises in the book, but the focus is on helping the students to become familiar with the vocabulary and expressions they need in discussing and teaching Buddhist ideas.

While in Sri Lanka, Ken and Visakha have compiled two other books. One is *A Pilgrim's Companion: Readings from Buddhist Texts to Enhance a Pilgrimage to the Sacred Sites*. This small book includes suttas, verses, and stories from the Buddhist texts related to each site visited on a pilgrimage to the sacred sites of India and Nepal, and readings and reflections for more than a month of daily meditation. The second is *Buddhist Crossword Puzzles*, a collection of 52 puzzles, where each clue is a sentence using the keyword in a Buddhist context.