



GASSHO

DECEMBER

2010

Issue No: 12-10

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



Season's Greetings



MONTH'S THOUGHT



In this world there are areas that can be seen with the eyes and those that cannot be seen — in other words, we have the world of material things and that of the heart and mind. The harmonization of these two worlds is known in Buddhism as "this very form is itself emptiness" (*shiki soku zeku*). The form (*shiki*) ... refers to the material world that can be seen with the eyes. Emptiness (*ku*) refers to the spiritual world that cannot be seen with the eyes.

.... [Koin Takada. *The Spirit of Buddhism Today*. p. 96]



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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR DECEMBER 2010

1st SUN Dec 5th:

9 A.M. English Service
Dharma Talk for
Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

2nd SUN Dec 12th:

**Shinshu Kyokai's
Bodhi Day Service**
9 A.M. English Service
Speaker: Rev. Tatsuguchi
"Shadows in the Shade"

3rd SUN Dec 19th:

9 A.M. English Service
Dharma Talk for
Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

4th SUN Dec 26th:

MONTHLY FAMILY WORSHIP
9 A.M. English Service
"Dharma Talk"
Rev. Tatsuguchi

FRIDAY NIGHT Dec 31st:

"New Year's Eve Service"
10 P.M. English Service

SATURDAY MORNING Jan 1st, 2011:

"New Year's Day Service"
10 A.M. English Service

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

KARAOKE CLASS Mon - 7 - 9 P.M.
Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

KARATE Tues/Fri - 6 - 9 P.M.
Shihan - Walter Nishioka

FUJINKAI SEWING CLUB Wed - 9 - 11 A.M.
J. Kobuke/A. Murata

HAWAII EISA CHIMUGUKURU DAIKO
Mr. Van Shimabukuro
Wed/Thur 6.30-8.30

THANK YOU FOR
YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS!!

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DHARMA-KAYA, AMIDA BUDDHA and SAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

In this year's issues of *GASSHO* I dealt with certain passages of Shinran's *Shoshin Nembutsu Ge* in the hopes that you might get to know how profound and significant it is to be "transformed" by Amida's Infinite Wisdom's Light and her Beneficent Compassion Immeasurable Life that has never abandoned any sentient being. I hope that you will, at the least, begin the quest to know of Amida Buddha's Unconditional Compassion that embraces especially the "evil person" to never forsake him and lead him to enlightenment by her Wisdom's luminations.

I hope you will begin to read and re-read and keep re-reading Shinran Shonin's *Shoshin Nembutsu Ge* and the *Tannisho*. For the more you read and keep re-reading, the more you will keep discovering how the things of life that are sacred and spiritual are being defiled and desecrated by us as mindless and insensitive human beings. In realizing this undeniable actuality, one is brought deeper and deeper into the Truth of Amida's Selflessness and her all-embracing Togetherness that has always been with us and has never abandoned us. For Amida has vowed never to forsake us until we become full-fledged Buddhas.

Therefore, I will end this year's final issue of *GASSHO* by touching on a few more passages from the *Shoshin Ge* and the *Tannisho*.

According to lines 21 to 24 of the *Shoshin Ge*, Sakyamuni appeared from the World of Formless *Dharmakaya* to be born as a Prince in India who later attained enlightenment under the *Bodhi* Tree. The Prince then became Sakyamuni Buddha, the *World's Most Honored and Revered One*. He then revealed the Four Noble Truths to all mankind and the existence of Amida Buddha who especially grasps karma-riddled beings to never forsake or abandon them until such time they finally come to attain their Buddhahood.

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

... Good people, bad people, noble and low, are not differentiated in the Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, in which the guiding of each person is primary and fundamental. Know that the true essence of the Pure Land teaching (Jodo Shinshu) is that when we realize true and real shinjin, we are born in the true fulfilled land. ...

[Notes on Essentials of Faith. p. 39]

The significance of the sequence of these events is indicated as follows:

The reason as to why the *Tathagata*
appeared (was born) on earth,
This was solely to expound
the Ocean-like Vows
of Amida Buddha.

The immeasurable ocean of beings
born in these Times of Evil
plagued by the five defilements,
They should all trust and take refuge
in the words of this *Tathagata*
that are true and real!

[rkt trans.]

The key term of significance here is "*Tathagata*."

Tathagata means that Buddhas are constantly appearing from the Formless State of *Dharmakaya*-as-Suchness in the "six realms of transmigration" to unconditionally grasp and embrace sentient beings with Compassion as they illuminate the Way to *Nirvana* with Wisdom's Light. *Tathagatas* are constantly appearing here, there and everywhere in the "ten endless directions and boundless regions of the universe." Amida Buddha is such a Buddha who endlessly keeps appearing here, there and everywhere to unendingly bring those who trust and take refuge in him back to his Pure Land to become enlightened Buddhas equal to him.

Sakyamuni who was born in India was such a *Tathagata* who emerged as a Buddha from the World of *Dharmakaya*-as-Suchness. He appeared to be conceived by a King father and Queen mother and was born as the Infant Buddha-to-be. He lived a life of regal privilege and entitlements in his youth and got married like any other man who then fathered a son.

However, he was completely shocked when he saw a deathly ill person, a person devastated by the

debilities of aging, and a bloated, smelly corpse rotting away. He had never before come across such sights because he was purposely sheltered from such devastating realities of life. Many of us today are also shielded from such realities because modern life assigns the dealing with such unpleasant actualities to professionals and specialists. In other words, "out of sight, out of mind."

Disillusioned by such facts of life, the young Prince decided to leave his comfortable life and set out to seek the meaning of life as a homeless mendicant. After some years of disappointing asceticism, he vowed to sit under a *Bodhi* tree in immovable meditation until he found the answers to the untenable contradictions and befuddling paradoxes of life. For instance, why life entails death, or why love turns into hate. He suddenly understood and attained enlightenment. The purpose of his appearing as a human being was then fulfilled in becoming The Perfectly Awakened One. He began to reveal the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path for all mankind that was based on a life of Selflessness and Togetherness.

The second meaning of being born as an Infant-Buddha-to-be is most significant. For it embodies the Dharma's very Selflessness and Togetherness manifesting itself as Amida's Sacred Name. For Sakyamuni revealed Amida Buddha's existence and his Vows of Compassion. This revelation opened the only way in which beings hopelessly riddled by "evil karma" could be saved! This *Tathagata* or Amida radiates Wisdom's Light of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness embraces all things and beings within its Boundless Compassion. Amida Buddha's Sacred Name manifests the Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness. Amida's Boundless Compassion especially grasps us human beings who are hopelessly riddled with shameful desires, passions and vanities in order to transform our thoughtlessness into thoughtfulness and mindlessness into mindfulness. His Wisdom and Compassion transforms our ingratitude into gratitude, irreverence into reverence, especially our impertinence into penitence.

The "words ... true and real," therefore, refer to the words of Sakyamuni that expounded on and revealed Amida's Forty-eight Vows of Boundless Compassion which were duly consummated in the form of his Sacred Name that is easy for anyone to say, utter, and repeat. Whenever we say, repeat and chant it, it fills us not only with gratitude and reverence, but also with remorse and repentance concerning our arrogance and impertinence.

Why are the transformative powers and virtues of these six sacred syllables ***Na-moh A-mida Butsu*** true and real? They are so because by just reciting, repeating or saying *Na-moh-a-mida-butsu*, the Truth of Selflessness begins transforming our selfishness into thoughts, words and acts of unselfishness that bring people and things into a sacred Togetherness. Until we human beings take refuge and trust in Amida's powers of Wisdom and her virtues of Compassion, we can never become "awake" and "aware" of how we are undeniably full of blind passions and foolish vanities that keep undermining our best of intentions and good will with our subtle willfulness and self-justifications.

Now, let us turn to lines 27 and 28. These lines can be translated as follow:

When ordinary people, religious sages,
heinous transgressors, and
slanderers of Dharma,
When they enter the Tathagata's
Ocean of Equanimity,
they all become one in taste.
[rkt trans]

Basically, these words refer to the transformative powers of Wisdom's Selflessness that "takes in" and "embrace all beings" without prejudice or rejections "just as they actually are" to equally transform them all into Buddhas by virtue of Unconditional Compassion such as the sun ripens all edible and inedible fruits without discrimination. What this means as mentioned in former issues of *GASSHO*, is that a green persimmon in becoming a ripe persimmon, is still a persimmon and has not been turned into an apple or an orange, which the term "conversion" implies.

Ultimately, the goal of Amida Buddha is to especially bring all sentient beings, both "good" and "evil," to their final enlightenment and Buddhahood. Even the likes of Prince Ajatasatru who committed the "five unforgivable transgressions," as well as Devadatta, cousin of Sakyamuni, who tried to murder Sakyamuni, both, along with King Bimbisara and Queen Vaidehi, were all equally "transformed" by the superior karmic power and virtues of the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of all-embracing Togetherness manifest as Amida Buddha as his Sacred Name.

Lines 29 to 34 especially tell of how we human beings, because of our deceptions and defilements, for this very reason are being unfailingly illuminated and unconditionally embraced by Amida Buddha's Immeasurable Life. As manifestations of the Ultimate

Dharma's Infinite Wisdom, its luminations manifest themselves as the Truth of Selflessness and as the Reality of Compassion that holds and sustains all things and life forms in a sacred, inseparable divine relationship without any condemnations, discriminations or rejections. Such a Truth and Actuality cannot be put into mere words, concepts or symbols. To do so, they then become mere philosophical jargon or theological abstractions that are not actual or real. This is why the Ultimate Dharma is Inconceivable, Inexplicable and, therefore, "Formless" (*Nirvana* without residues) because words and concepts fail to describe it.

Lines 29 to 34 can be metaphorically translated, therefore, as follows:

The All-embracing Light
 constantly shines and protects.
 Although it already has penetrated
 the darkness of our ignorance,
 The dark clouds of our
 greed, resentments and hate
 Keep obscuring the radiant skies above
 of True Faith.
 Though the Sun of Wisdom is obscured
 by the dark clouds below it,
 Yet it keeps penetrating through them
 to unflinchingly illuminate the darkness
 that is below them

[rkt trans]

Each line in these verses are significant in clarifying what Jodoshinshu faith is all about. For they point out how the Formless Dharma manifests itself as Amida's Wisdom's Light that is not obstructed by the evils of man (the ominous dark clouds of human passions and vanities). They also explain how Amida's Boundless Compassion penetrates even into the very darkness of man's very ignorance without destroying the clouds of self illusion to illuminate all that is hidden in the pitch black darkness of his deepest unconscious without condemnations or rejections. In other words, this Light of Dharma's Wisdom does not shine only on "good persons" but especially on "evil persons."

Furthermore, the Light of Dharma's Universal Wisdom keeps breaking through a person's consciousness and sub-consciousness to illuminate and disperse the darkest darkness and murkiest of shadows in a person's deepest unconsciousness. This lumination happens in the very instant he trusts and takes refuge in Amida Buddha. This dispersion of darkness does not mean that when the darkness has been illuminated, the things that were in the darkness are destroyed

SHINRAN'S WASAN

In the worlds of the ten directions
 numerous like specks of dust
 Beings of Nembutsu are
 forever being watched over.
 By grasping to embrace them all
 is the reason he called Amida!

JODO Wasan No. 82
 rkt trans.

upon lumination. It means the things in darkness in being illuminated have become the very things as they are that are revealed. They are one's blind passions and vanities, only now fully illuminated and revealed! This is like when the light in a pitch black room is switched on. The furniture therein is not dismantled or destroyed.

In being so illuminated, the way and path that a person should walk becomes fully revealed before him with each step he begins taking back to the Pure Land. (See Shan'tao's *Parable of the White Path Between and Between Two Rivers of Fire and Water*.) In walking the Path of O-nembutsu, Amida Buddha has him in his firm unflinching grasp each step of the way to ensure that he will not slip or stumble into either the river of incinerating fire or into the river of freezing waters.

In the Dharmic religions (Hinduism, Brahminism, Buddhism, Jainism, etc.), the word *marga* means the path to the discovery of the universal (*desi*), or what is Selflessness and Togetherness. According to Buddhism this "Way" involves a "way of thinking, understanding, speaking, living, reflecting on self and contemplating on things that are eternally sacred and timelessly spiritual.

The final path of the Eightfold Path is the Right Contemplation of Amida Buddha. I have chosen, for clarity, to use the terms "the Truth of Selflessness" and "the Actuality of Togetherness" to describe the Way of O-nembutsu, which is to singularly "think of" and constantly "envision" Amida Buddha as the Truth of Selflessness and the Reality of Togetherness. Wisdom's Light are luminations of Selflessness. Compassion's Life are its warm rays of Togetherness.

This way of meditating on Amida as the Truth of Selflessness and living one's life according to the Actualities of Togetherness, such a life brings about a

“transformation” of one’s “ordinary life based on mere sensory discriminations” into “a life of spiritual conscienceness” through Amida’s powers of Wisdom and her virtues of Compassion. Such a life brings both the worlds of *samsara* and *Nirvana* into an inseparable, oneness and togetherness, a world in which “one is many” and “many is one in its boundless diversity.” Such an awakening frees a person from his egoism, ethnocentrism and religious convictions that have been conditioned by one’s egoism, family, society, culture, and personal beliefs characterized by exclusivity.

According to the Dharmic religions, “the ends for which men strive after in this world are basically three — nor more, no less; namely: gratifications and pleasure (*kama*), power and success (*artha*, pronounced “*art-ha*”), and lawful order and moral virtue (*dharma*).” (See Joseph Campbell. *Primitive Mythology*. p. 464.) These basic, underlying self-centered proclivities in man are depicted by the “six realms of transmigration,” or the ceaseless rounds of “births-and-deaths.” *Kama* (or sensory pleasure) is represented by the “celestial beings” enjoying all kinds of heavenly pleasures. *Artha* (or conflict) is represented by “fighting Titans” constantly striving for power and control. Then finally, *dharma* (or virtue) is represented by the line of endless Tathagata’s constantly descending as Bodhisattvas into each of the “six realms” and returning to ascend with beings as they break through the tight circle, or the “twelve links of causation,” out into the outer unbounded expanses of “unobstructed freedom.”

Though human beings are born with the natural tendency to indulge in *kama* and yet aspire after *artha*, they, however, are not born with

“... the sense of duty, the knowledge of one’s duty and the will to abide by it, they are not innate, but the aim is instilled in the youth by education. ” (J. Campbell. *loc. cite*. p. 466.)

Such then is also the karmic reality of *bonno* (blind passions and self vanities) that plagues a human being (*bombu*) with enticements and seductions of momentary pleasures (*bonno*). This is because human beings in and of themselves are not born with moral sensitivities or spiritual insights, and because of the fact that all things are impermanent! For this reason, they need to trust in the Light of the Dharma’s Selflessness manifesting itself as the Life of Togetherness, both of which are timeless and eternal.

If human beings are to attain genuine happiness and if peace and good will are to prevail in their lives,

they need to trust and take refuge in Amida Buddha. For,

.... The un-socialized thought and feeling of the very young child are egocentric but not socially dangerous. When the primary urges of the adolescent remain un-socialized, however, they become inevitably a threat to the harmony of the group. ... (*ibid.* pp. 466, 467.)

Consequently, a person whose life is not illuminated by the Dharma’s Wisdom’s Selflessness and its Compassion of all-embracing Togetherness, such a person’s life becomes a life of wastefulness because of this self centered indulgences and personal excessiveness. Such a person is full of heedlessness and uncaring as to whether what he or she is thinking, desiring, saying and doing is hurtful and harmful to the well being and happiness of others and our surroundings.

Lines 107 and 108 are the words of Master Genshin. They can be translated as follows:

Though my eyes are continually
obscured by passions and vanity,
Boundless Compassion
yet continues to embrace me!
[rkt trans]

These words of Genshin make it undoubtedly clear that the powers of Amida Buddha’s Wisdom Light and her illuminating virtues of Boundless Compassion are constantly being directed to all beings.

Now, I will close with lines 113 to 116, which are the words of Master Honen, Shinran’s spiritual mentor. They translate as follows:

One’s constant returning
to this cyclic house
of endless births-and-deaths
Is basically due to one’s
holding on to doubts!
To instantly enter the states
of Serenity, and Happiness
without any residues,
This is to have entered the state
of true faith as the efficient cause!
[rkt trans]

In other words, the underlying reason as to why a person is reborn and keeps returning to the “six realms of transmigration” is due to his doubts and uncertainties. The only way to break out of the “six realms” into the Boundless World of Ultimate Serenity and Tranquility,

says Master Honen, is for the person to trust and take refuge in Amida's Selfless Benevolence and her All-embracing Beneficence.

Once again, let us ponder deeply Shinran Shonin's words as follows:

... I do not know what the two, good and evil, really mean. I could say that I know what good is, if I knew good as thoroughly and completely as the *Tathagata*; and I could say I know what evil is, if I knew evil as thoroughly and completely as the *Tathagata*. But in this foolish being filled with blind passion, living in this impermanent world of burning house, all things are empty and vain; therefore, untrue. Only the nembutsu is true, real, and sincere. (T. Unno. *Tannisho*. Epilogue. p. 36.)

These words especially confirm the truth of lines 29 to 34 and 107 and 108, as translated above.

According to Jodoshinshu, when one gets to the Pure Land, one becomes a full-fledged Buddha, who then, as do all Selfless Buddhas, keeps returning as a *Tathagata* to enter the various worlds of transmigration as a descending Bodhisattva to save beings drowning in selfishness and burning with divisive resentments. A person who has become a Buddha joins in the eternal work and activity of the Tathagatas as a Bodhisattva returning to retrieve others who are yet suffering in the "six realms of *samsara*" to bring them back to the Pure Land.

Lines 69 to 72 state this activity as follows:

Upon getting to the Realm,
the Lotus Treasure Store,
Instantaneously one realizes
the State of Thusness,
the Dharmakaya as Suchness!
He returns with transcendent powers
to freely frolic in the forest
to untangle blind passions
and vanities!

[rkt trans]

These lines, therefore, confirm that a Tathagata descends and ascends as a Bodhisattva. This is further attested to by the words of our beloved Shonin Shinran as follows:

... when we become free from self-power and quickly attain the enlightenment of the Pure Land,

we will save those bound closest to us through transcendental powers, no matter how deeply they are immersed in karmic suffering of the six realms of existence and the four modes of rebirth. (T. Unno. *Tannisho*. Chap V. p. 10.)

Such then is the Truth of Amida's Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness that confirms the fact that the world of *samsara* and *Nirvana* are inseparable in which sentient beings countless as are the grains of sand of the Ganges River are forever and endlessly being grasped and embraced by Amida Buddha.

Once again, let us, over the Holiday Season refresh and renew our dedication to work for the welfare of all beings and things, especially our fellow human beings with thoughts, words and acts of kindness, tenderness, joy and equity, or thoughts and feelings of "peace" and "good will" toward all men!

For the Truth and Reality of Life is based on the principle of what is ***jiri rita en'man*** which means:

Your suffering is my suffering!
Your pleasure is my pleasure!
Your happiness is my happiness!
Your sorrow is my responsibility!
I will endure any suffering
to make you happy!
I cannot be happy unless
all sentient beings
in the ten quarters
are happy!

(Y. Tamai. *Ichinyo*. p. 8)

Such then is the significance of Amida's Primal Vow and the real meaning of the "exclusionary clause" as appended to it. This was explained in previous issues of *Gassho* which, in reality, is an admonition and not a rejection or abandonment of those who have committed the "five deadly transgressions" and "slandered the Dharma."

Let us as Jodoshinshu Buddhists reflect on and contemplate once again this profound meaning of Amida's Boundless Compassion that transcends the one-sided love or affections one has for one's self, family, kinfolk, friends, country and religion, which is only natural. Let us, however, participate in the Unconditional Compassion that includes all the families of mankind as one big *Ohana* that is found in Amida's Selflessness and Togetherness. For Amida's Compassion also includes plants, trees, animals, and mother earth herself. Let us apply its truth and reality

to all that we are thinking, feeling, saying and doing in the coming New Year, the year 2011, for the future of all mankind depends on this transformation of man's mind and heart, especially his body and spirit!

Once again, Seasons Greetings and Best Wishes for a Happy New Year from me and my family to you all.

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

If people meditate on the Buddha [or recite his name], you should know that they become white lotus flowers among the people, and Kannon Bodhisattva and Seishi Bodhisattva will be their superb friend, they will sit in the place for practicing the Way, and be born into the home of all the Buddhas (the land of Amida Buddha). [Amida Sutra (Kenjo Murakami trans.) p. 164]

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What are the "ten worlds?"

ANSWER: According to Koin Takada in his *The Spirit of Buddhism Today* (pp. 74-75), when we put our hands together in *gassho*, the ten fingers come into contact. The ten fingers represent "our mind, heart, body and spirit" coming together in reverence and gratitude.

The ten fingers coming together also represent the ten worlds, the lowest of hells to the highest states of enlightenment, which are inseparable. They are the worlds (or states) of demonic existence, insatiable existence, brutish being, being all too human, competitive being, heavenly existence, a being who is "listening" and "beginning" to become "enlightened," a being who has finally attained and is enjoying the joys of "enlightenment," a being sharing the joys of "enlightenment" with others, and finally, a perfect Buddha who grasps and embraces especially the lowest of sentient beings to bring them all to their enlightenment.



Year's End, New Year

Friday night, December 31

New Year's Eve Service
10 p.m. English service

**Saturday morning,
January 1, 2011**

New Year's Day Service
10 a.m. English service

Thank you

To all volunteers and donors
to the Fujinkai Bazaar

**Thank you for helping make
this year's fund-raiser a success**



Mahalo, HI 5

SKM Fujinkai thanks you
for the empty cans and
bottles for recycling.

Continuing donations are
much appreciated!