



# GASSHO

## December

### 2011

Issue No: 12-11

*"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"*



# Season's Greetings

## MONTH'S THOUGHT



In the last century Western scientists are arriving at the same conclusion: The universe is indeed comprised of a single substance, and all sense of being — consciousness — subsequently arises from it. ... Fundamentally we are individual expressions of a single entity, inextricably connected to one another, **we are all drops of the same ocean.** [Internet posting on "ABOUT NON-DUALITY." Bold for emphasis.]



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# REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SERVICES FOR DECEMBER

### 1st SUN Dec 4th:

SKM Services Cancelled  
Please Attend  
**HBC BODHI DAY SERVICE**

### 2nd SUN Dec 11th:

#### **Shinshu Kyokai's BODHI DAY SERVICE**

9 A.M. English Service  
Sermon:  
*"SAKYAMUNI and AMIDA"*

### 3rd SUN Dec 18th:

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

### 4th SUN Dec 25th:

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

### **SATURDAY NIGHT, Dec 31st:**

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

### **SUNDAY MORNING, Jan 1st, 2012:**

**SPECIAL  
"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

*With Deepest Sympathy*

Mrs. Tsuruko Sugiyama 92 yrs. Oct. 30, 2011

**THANK YOU**

*for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!*

## YEAR-END REFLECTIONS FOR 2011

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

The eighth of December is the day when Prince Siddhartha awoke to the Dharma's Truth of Wisdom's Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness under the Bodhi Tree. Jodoshinshu Buddhists revere this Truth and Reality of the Dharma that are constantly manifesting themselves as Amida's Infinite Wisdom and her Boundless Compassion that have and continue to embrace all things and beings. This Truth and Reality were expounded by Prince Siddhartha when he became the "World's Most Awakened One," the "Muni," the "Great One," the "Perfectly Enlightened one!"

Soon thereafter he began to turn "the six realms of transmigration," the side of the Wheel of Life turning in the counter clockwise rotation over to the side of "the Eightfold Noble Path," or the side of "the Dharmacakra" that is always turning in the clockwise rotation! In doing so, he began "to transform" the various beings in the "Six Realms of Transmigration" with the Dharma's "Wisdom" and "Compassion."

According to Buddhist history, Sakyamuni first began turning the "Wheel of Dharma by revealing the Four Noble Truths. These Truths lead a person to the Noble Eightfold Path. Buddha's second turning of the "Wheel of Dharma" occurred when he declared the Truth of Emptiness, the fact that there is "no permanent, unchanging thing or self" (*anatman*) because "all things and forms of life are constantly changing and never stay the same" (*sarva dhamma anicca*).

In his third turning of the "Wheel of Dharma," Sakyamuni Buddha began speaking of the incalculable number of Buddhas residing "in the ten endless directions." He spoke of the "endless directions" as being like a *garbha* a "womb" ["treasury" or "storehouse"] from whence endless Buddhas keep appearing as Bodhisattvas, who then "enter" each of the "six worlds of transmigration" to "grasp" sentient beings trapped therein, to then "return" with them back to their Pure Lands. These Buddhas, Bodhisattvas

## WORDS OF SHINRAN

I reflect within myself: The Universal Vow difficult to fathom is indeed **the great vessel bearing us across the ocean difficult to cross**. The unhindered light is the sun of wisdom dispersing the darkness of our ignorance.... Sakyamuni, the great hero, sought indeed to bless those committing the five grave offenses, those slandering the dharma, and those lacking the seed of buddhahood. We know, therefore, that the auspicious Name embodying the perfectly fulfilled virtues is true wisdom that transforms our evil into virtue, and that the diamond-like shinjin so difficult to accept is true reality that sweeps away doubt and brings us to the attainment of enlightenment. SBT-Series. *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*. Vol I. Preface. P. 57. Bold for emphasis

said Sakyamuni, are countless as are sands of the Ganges River.

Because these formless Buddhas keep manifesting themselves as Bodhisattvas, they are referred to as *Tathagatas*, meaning they are all "enlightened beings" full of Infinite Wisdom and Boundless Compassion who keep appearing the World of Dharma which is like a Treasury and Storehouse of the Truth of Selflessness and the Reality of Togetherness.

According to Jodo Shinshu teachings, Amida Buddha is a special manifestation from this Storehouse of Dharma who has entered and resides in the very "center" of each sentient being's heart of hearts. For the heart is exactly where a person's "everyday consciousness" intersects with his "spiritual conscience-ness" that connects his person with the Dharma's Selflessness above and its Togetherness below. This intersect or nexus then also connects the person to the endless dimensions of the World of Dharma above, below, the sides and all around this earth of ours. Amida's Sacred Name, therefore, is full of Selfless Light and Unconditional Life that especially converges into a person's heart who is hopelessly riddled by moral confusions, spiritual ignorance and karmic evils. The goal and purpose of Amida appearing in a person's conscience is to transform the "darkness" in him into "light" (which is not to incinerate or obliterate him into oblivion with fire).

In his fourth turning of the "Dharma Wheel," Sakyamuni presented a psychosomatic analysis of

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human consciousness that pretty much anticipated the findings of today's psychological, psychiatric, medical and scientific community that keep pointing to and revealing the facts concerning the inseparable matters of the mind, heart, body and spirit [see Month's Thought]. These dimensions to a human being cannot be separated one from the other three. They are not four discrete entities or aspects of a person's anatomy or being that can be separately dealt with as done in modern medical practice.

Sakyamuni Buddha's analysis of human consciousness later became the basis for a school of Buddhism called *Yogacara* based on the premise that there is a source of a greater consciousness (*amala-vijjana*="taintless consciousness") that fully embraces man's everyday, ordinary consciousness confined to his five senses and brain functions dependent on its surroundings alone. Freud, Jung and others seem to have benefited from this school of Buddhist psychology in developing their specific and respective understandings of what are the conscious, subconscious, unconscious and collective unconsciousness.

If one is to understand the profound significance of Sakyamuni Buddha's "transforming" of the "six realms of transmigration" into True Light and Real Life, one has to "visualize" in one's "spiritual mind's eye" what are the inseparable and paradoxical connections between what are the "six realms of transmigration" and the "Noble Eightfold Path," and how they are connected to one's mind, body, conscience and spirituality.

In doing so, such a person will then come to see and realize that the world of samsara is inseparable from the Totality of the Nirvanic State that is without residues of selfishness, resentments, and vanities. This is why the Tathagatas keep "appearing" as a Selfless Buddhas who keep incarnating themselves as Bodhisattvas like the Bodhisattva Dharmakara described in the Sutra of Greater Immeasurable Life (*Bussetu Dai-muryoju Kyo*). This Sutra describes the noble goal of Bodhisattva Dharmakara who fulfilled his Vows to then become Amida Buddha to save and liberate each and all sentient beings, especially those hopelessly riddled by karmic evils.

The Way of the Eightfold Path therefore implies that one's mind, body and spirituality are inseparable and one. This then is the meaning of the expressions: "one and yet many," and "many and yet one." A person's mind, body and spirit are fully enfolded by the World of Amida and, therefore, also by the World of Dharma. This complex relationship, as I have often mentioned, can be likened to three concentric circles revolving around a common center point. Spherically envisioned, they become three concentric spheres rotating around a common vertical axis.

The seamless relationship between sentient beings, Amida Buddha and the World of Dharma is expressed as *bonno soku bodai* meaning: the world of human beings with their passions and vanities is simultaneously fully contained and embraced without discriminations and rejections within the World of Dharma manifesting itself as Amida's Wisdom and Compassion that accept all beings unconditionally.

In Mahayana Buddhism the state of darkness (*avidya*) and the state of light (*bodhi*) are likened to the two sides of a single coin called the "Wheel of Life." One side lies in total darkness while the other side is fully illuminated. This two-sided coin analogy depicts the inseparable relationship between darkness (virtual reality) and illumination (reality as it actually is). This two-sided fact and actuality of life is illustrated when the lights of a pitch black room are "switched on." When the lights are turned on, its illumination does not incinerate and obliterate the things or people in the room when the "darkness" is instantaneously dispersed by "light." The darkness simply is "instantly transformed" into total illumination, or light itself. When the room, the things and the people in it are so instantly illuminated, are they suddenly incinerated into oblivion?

Now, when the lights are "switched off," the room and everything in it, do they not once again instantly become enshrouded in total darkness? And when the lights are switched off, do the things, people or the room then obliterated into oblivion by the darkness?

Such then are the inseparable and paradoxical relationships between "life and death," "good and evil" and "light and darkness?" This inseparable relationship between light and darkness can also be seen as the earth rotates on its vertical axis to be illuminated by the light of day and darkened by the darkness of a moonless night. As the rotating earth becomes illuminated by the rays of the dawning sun, the earth in being so illuminated is not being obliterated. As the sun disappears over the western horizon, the earth where one stands once again becomes enshrouded by the night's oncoming darkness. Whether in the "light of day" or in the "darkness of night," the earth itself keeps rotating on its vertical axis it keeps circumambulating the sun while the moon keeps circling it. Is the earth incinerated by the dawning sun or obliterated into a "no-thing-ness" by the night's oncoming darkness?

Therefore, when you turn your life that was rotating in the wrong direction and begin turning in the right direction, you become like a migratory bird steadfastly following the light of the dawning sun that becomes the noonday sun, then the setting sun that finally sinks over the western horizon, to then once again become the next morning's "light of dawn!" In doing so, as the earth constantly turns, you become, like a migrating bird that keeps breaking out of the

darkness of night to follow the next morning's rising sun. In this migratory process you should not be destroying the things and forms of life all around you or your own self in the process. Morally, ethically and spiritually, this "turning" or "changing" is the process of "self transformation." This turning from the counter clockwise rotation against the flow of life into the clockwise rotation in harmony with the flow of life, this is the most difficult of difficult things for a human being to do because we are full of blinding passions and foolish vanities, said Shinran.

This is because human beings are caught up in their own sensualities, sexuality and personal agendas that are especially tainted by moral confusions and spiritual ignorance as well as ethnocentric misconceptions and theological misunderstandings. The reason why this is so, says Shinran, is because each person is full of personal assumptions and self justifications that are constantly tainted by his dubious personal "likes," "dislikes," especially his self "vanities" and "pride" often warped by his egoism, ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism, of not by superstitions and misconceptions.

This is why the "six realms of transmigration" are full of imagined and imaginary shadows that keep turning a person's head and heart in the counterclockwise rotation in an environment of "virtual realities." This is because of causality and especially our karma as depicted by the outer rim comprised of the "twelve links of causation that tightly circumscribe the "six realms." This "rim of causation" is rotating in the counterclockwise fashion. The twelve linear sequences of cause-to-effect lead a person into consequences characterized by past, present and future karma that are cyclic. They can be positive, negative or neutral.

In this way, the "twelve links" are telling us of what has happened in the past that is either positively or negatively effecting and affecting what is happening now in the present because of the unified laws of causality. The karmic consequences of the present then in turn come to affect the karma of the next phase that lies in the future yet to come. This is why the more things change the more they keep repeating the same cyclic patterns of behaviour. The six realms are all governed by the "twelve links of causation." These sequences characterize the counter clockwise rounds of "ceaseless births and deaths" (*samsara*). Whether we "turn about" to head in the "clockwise rotation" to finally break out of the cycles of endless births and deaths or not, this decision is your choice to make. No one else can make it for you.

Therefore, what Sakyamuni Buddha did for the sake of all mankind was to basically reveal the Four Noble Truths that leads to the Eightfold Noble Way that finally leads a person to the Right Contemplation

## SHINRAN'S WASAN

Have faith and take refuge  
in Amida's Primal Vow!  
All who have believe and trust  
in Amida's Primal Vow,  
Because of its virtues and benefits  
that grasps and  
embraces all beings  
to never abandon them,  
Therefore, will all come to  
attain Supreme enlightenment!

SHOZOMATSU WASAN No. 1  
rkt trans.

of Amida Buddha (C w/brkn C) that "turns over" the wheel of his life into the Wheel of Dharma. The Eightfold Path enables a person to begin turning his life around into the "clockwise rotation" that then unwinds to finally break him out of the endless rounds of births and deaths into the realms of unobstructed freedom. By trusting and taking refuge in Amida's Name through the Right Contemplation of Amida as the truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness, a person becomes enabled thereby to break through the tight rim that governs the cycle of ceaseless births and deaths (c w/ c). Upon breaking out of the rim we begin to soar in the nirvanic realms of "unobstructed freedom" (C w/o C) just as the mortals we are, riddled by shameful desires and blinding passions, only now fully secure in the grasp and embrace of Amida Buddha (C w/ brkn C) who never forsakes, rejects or abandons anyone!

For this reason, Amida Buddha at the very center of our hearts sits in immovable meditation full of commiseration and pity for us who are being constantly harassed by the boar, asp and rooster. This is because the very center of our hearts is also where our illusory ego constantly is turning in the counterclockwise rotation around Amida Buddha who at the very center is all calm and silent. The self conscious ego of ours keeps asserting itself. This ego as mentioned is characterized by the wild black boar (selfishness), the venomous asp (spitefulness), and the crowing rooster (impertinence). All three are constantly proclaiming what is "mine" and "not yours." Amida in the middle does not reprimand or punish the three creatures because of their shameful antics. Why? This is because the thoughts, words and deeds of human beings are constantly affected by unwholesome thoughts, desires and devious agendas as long as they live and exist. For human beings in order to survive have to consume other living things and innocent creatures. Such is the contradiction that is the sad paradox of life.

Let us now look at the ideograms for *inochi*, *sei-mei*, and *un'mei* to then look at the terms *son'zai-suru*, *iki-ru*, and *akira-meru*. Before we look into these words and phrases let us remind ourselves that the first path of the Eightfold Path states that the goal of Right Understanding is: "To keep ourselves free from prejudice, superstition, and delusions, and seek to understand the true nature of life." (*Praises Of The Buddha*. p. 149).

The Japanese sense of *inochi* or to be truly alive is influenced especially by the Buddhist principle of "nonviolence" (*ahimsa*). This principle implies a heartfelt sincerity and intuition that not only animate forms of life but also the underlying inanimate elements of life are equally to be regarded sacred and spiritual. The reason is because each thing and life form, no matter how microscopic, possesses Buddha's Mind (*busshin*) and Buddha's Nature (*bussho*). Thus, many Japanese Buddhists, though unfamiliar with Buddhist technical terms and philosophical concepts, often blurt out expressions like: *mono wa ikiteru ken' no ... mono wa somatsu ni shichaa akan de* and *mono wo ikasana ikan no*. Such expressions reveal a simple sensitivity that "even inanimate things have potential to become a Buddha because they have Buddha's Mind and Buddha's Nature. This is why to be excessive and wasteful with the very things that sustain life" is to be a desecration of things sacred and spiritual.

Now, in the Japanese sense of *kokoro* there is also the sensitivity and awareness of each vibrant passing moment of life can never be exactly repeated or replicated like what mass media does in terms of feeding the public with their edited and skewed rhetorical and photographic reproductions of reality that are but insensitive replications of what is happening or has already happened. For when life's fragility is so fabricated, the living moments of yesterday, today and tomorrow become fiction or "virtual images" of what was or is an ongoing unrepeatable living moment of life. I believe that these sensitivities and significances concerning the delicate fragility of life are implied by the terms *busshin* and *bussho*. The difference between "pulsating life" and "virtual reality" are the discrepancies between the self that is breathing and pulsating from the pretentious self that pretends to be what it is not.

This discrepancy between one's real self and false self is also found in how we regard and handle living and non-living things as though they were mere objects, commodities or merchandise to be utilized then discarded. This is different from regarding and handling them as things permeated by sacredness and spirituality. I believe this way of *kokoro* is the Way of seeing such sacredness and spirituality even in seemingly inanimate things like dewdrops, raindrops, pebbles and grains of sand. For a person with *kokoro* manifests a delicate regard for the fragility of things, especially for each

moment of life that can never be repeated. Such is the sensitivity and sincerity of a heart that is free of contrivances, calculations and a self-serving agendas. For *kokoro* means all four dimensions of one's mind, heart, body and spirit permeated by the Truth of Selflessness and its Spirit of Togetherness that connect a person with the actuality that all things are inseparable and connected.

Such reciprocity and inseparability between the "world of sentient beings" and the "World of the Buddhas" as seen in the Dharmic religions are not seen in the Abrahamic religions that sharply condemn what is the "world of flesh" deemed to be full of carnal abominations from the "world of spirit" designated to be divine and full of purity. This is like cutting a whole pie in two, three, or four parts and trying then to determine which piece is edible from the other pieces that are deemed to be inedible.

This arbitrary discrepancy between what is acceptable and unacceptable, I believe, is the situation that troubles our world today. Ever since the Iberian expansion, the gap between those who have become the "haves" who are exploiting the "have nots" has increased and continues to dramatically increase as the richer get richer and the poor poorer.

This growing gap that has become a breach between "the world of merchandise" and "the world of spirit" can be sensed in one of Misuzu Kaneko's poems for children. The sense of *kokoro* as she presents is now a rarity amongst us victimized by what is Wall Street and the Belt Way. As a Shin Buddhist she saw the drops of morning dew rolling off the petals of flowers as tears flowing. One early morning she must have seen the bees as though they were "stealing" the nectar from the flowers innocently blooming under the morning's dawning light. So the dewdrops flowing down the petals of each flower seemed to be like teardrops flowing down a person's face. The poem is as follows:

### Dew

Let's not tell anyone shall we ...  
About the tears  
On the flower petals this morning.

If word got around  
And the bees heard about it,

They may return the nectar  
They had taken  
As if they had done something bad.

(Daishin Ueyama. *Misuzu's World of the Nembutsu*. p. 11)

Such a delicate thought, feeling and sensitivity comes from the Buddhist understanding of the underlying

principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence) that underlies all Dharmic religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

The American poet laureate William Stanley Merwin, a son of a Presbyterian minister, grew up as a Christian. As a resident in Hana, Maui, he became a practicing Zen Buddhist under the late Zen Roshi Robert Aitken. He composed the following poem that is a mixture of Christian sensibility transformed by a Buddhist sense of *kokoro*, as follows:

### For a Coming Extinction

Gray whale  
Now that we are sending you to the End  
That great god  
Tell him  
That we who follow you  
    invented forgiveness  
And forgive nothing.

This poem, I believe, unconsciously manifests the underlying difference between Amida Buddha's Unconditional Compassion that never forsakes or abandons any sentient being from the love of the "great god," who Merwin implies "invented forgiveness" and yet "forgives nothing." This poem clearly has been influenced by a view of an "Omnipotent Creator God" who, paradoxically, is said to be "omni-benevolent" yet, in the end, casts those who defy him into a "lake that burneth with fire and brimstone ..." (Rev. 21: 8).

Shinran Shonin philosophically expresses the sentiment and insight awakened by the all-embracing *kokoro* of Amida Buddha full of commiseration for all things living and non-living that are in an inseparable sacred and spiritual relationship embraced by the Compassion of the Buddhas or the Tathagatas throughout the Dharma World as follows:

... Buddha nature is none other than Tathagata.  
This Tathagata pervades the countless worlds;  
it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of  
beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain  
Buddhahood. SBT-Series. *Notes on 'Essentials on  
Faith Alone.'* p. 42.

What Shinran is saying here is that, in the Buddhist perspective, plants, insects and even the simplest of things that go unnoticed like pebbles and grains of sand, they are all sacred and spiritual because they have in them the elemental nature and essence of Dharma that permeates them all with Buddha Mind (*busshin* = spirituality) and Buddha Nature (*bussho* = sacredness). This way of looking at life and things certainly differs from the view that the lesser creatures of the air, land and sea as well as the flora were all created by an all-loving Creator God for the sole benefit and use of man alone, especially the first man Adam and his bloodline

descendants who were created in the very image of God and his angels. (See Genesis 1: 27-30).

Now, *sei-mei* or life's vibrancy breathing and pulsating in each life is also the underlying meaning of *inochi*. *Inochi* also conveys a sensitivity for a living form's "one and only life." It is the sense that has been deeply touched and moved by a sacredness and spirituality that transcends one's "everyday consciousness" that only pursues sensual and pragmatic goals. A life or *inochi* based on Selflessness and Togetherness is very different from a person whose sense of ego is always contriving and calculating to gain self advantages and supremacy over others and the things of mother nature.

Consequently, the ideograph *inochi* conveys a profound feeling of indebtedness and gratefulness for all that sustains and supports life, such as the air, water, and the very nutrients found in the earth itself. But more importantly and most significantly and paradoxically, there is also a heartfelt remorse and sadness that one's own life, as mentioned, must feed on the lives of innocent things and creatures in order for oneself to survive and continue on (Charles Darwin himself came to face and feel this sense of commiseration in his scientific observations and "documentations" of life forms competing constantly with other life forms to preserve and perpetuate their own kind).

Once again, this sense of remorse for man's unavoidable consuming of lesser forms of life can be seen in another of Misuzu Kaneko's poems aimed to raise such sensitivities concerning the life of lesser creatures in children as follows:

### Big Catch

How exciting!  
    It's a big catch,  
    A huge catch of Oba sardines.

The shore is filled with activity,  
    Just like a festival,  
But deep in the ocean  
    The sardines left behind  
    Must be conducting funeral services.  
    D. Ueyama. *Loc. cite.*, p. 24.

Such a feeling for the life of lesser creatures and innocent things of creation is manifested also by Japanese craftsmen even before disposing of their worn out tools of their trade.

Traditional Japanese artisans hold memorial services in gratitude and a sense of loss for their worn out tools before disposing of them to express their sadness and regret in having to part with them. For the worn out tools and implements once enabled them to eke out their very livelihoods. In the West, seldom

are such memorial services held in gratitude for inanimate things like worn out needles. Does this not say something about us as Americans and our core values?

Joseph Campbell, in his *Pathways to Bliss* (2004), makes an interesting observation between "traditional" and "modern" cultures, especially about us contemporary Americans, as follows:

In the societies of a traditional culture, then, maturity is the condition of living within the bounds of the cultural traditions. You become the vehicle of the moral order. You enforce it. You believe it. You are it. In our culture, we have a different requirement. We ask our students, our children, to be critical, to use their heads, to become individuals, and to assume responsibility for their own lives.... Yet it leads to a very new problem in relation to our mythologies. Unlike traditional cultures, we do not try to imprint the traditions onto the person with such force that the individual becomes simply a walking copy of what was there before. Rather, the idea is to develop the individual personality — a special and contemporary Western problem, it may surprise you to learn. (pp. 13, 14)

What Campbell calls a "contemporary Western problem" is actually now the problem of people the world over who have become "consummate and excessive consumers of mass-produced products and merchandise," or, as he simply puts it, a mere "walking copy of what was there before," or what I have been calling a "consummate carbon copy American consumer." In the wake of our excessive and wasteful lifestyles are left tons and tons of debris, discarded bulk items and toxic chemical and biological wastes. We have become parasitical like a tapeworm, consuming more and more at one end while excreting all the while more and more wastes at the other end.

People all over the world today, especially in China, have and are being seduced into becoming "consummate carbon copy Americans" of endless goods and gadgets" through what has become a global network of multinational corporations based on maximizing their profits and minimizing their expenses at the expense of cheap laborers and the devastation of pristine ecosystems. Therefore, William Mervin, as mentioned above, notes that our mega-multi-national corporations "symbolize" the "destruction of nature," the "felling of trees," the "extinction of whole species," and therefore, the wholesale "impoverishment of our planet" and "our culture's" capacity for symbolization, meaning sensitivity for what is sacred and spiritual has been diminished.

Let us now consider the phrase *akirame-ru* which is the verbal form of the noun *akirame*. Generally, the conventional meaning of *akirame* is taken negatively to mean "being resigned to the way things are," or, more ominously, "to accept one's destiny and one's fate as inescapable." The expression *shikata ga nai*, as mentioned, conveys also such a sense of hopelessness, despair and resignation. But these are not the real meanings of *akirame* or *akirame-ru* described by the Buddha or in Jodoshinshu teachings concerning the person riddled by karmic transgressions.

Attitudes of resignation implied by nihilism, negativism, pessimism or defeatism were not the Buddha's understanding of *akirame* or *akirame-ru* at all. This is clear in his rejection of the extremes of hedonism and especially asceticism. *Akirame* and *akirame-ru* are the phonetic Japanese readings for the Chinese ideogram *tai* which is the *tai* in *shisho-tai* or the Four Noble Truths. These truths (or *tai*) do not mean "nothing can be done to solve the problems of suffering" due to the extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial. This *tai*, instead, stands for the Truth of the existence of a problem of extremes that must be acknowledged even before the root causes and reasons for them can be properly diagnosed. Only then can a way of treatment be formulated to solve the problem. Thus Sakyamuni revealed the Eightfold Noble Path as the proper treatment and solution for problems concerning one's mind, heart, conscience and spirituality.

To walk the Eightfold Path is to pursue the Path that leads a person to become free from what is imaginary, fictional, illusiory and delusional, especially unwarranted superstitions and falsehoods. For these then become the basis for dogmatism and fanaticism. Karmically, *tai* means to be ethically responsible and accountable for one's thoughts, words and actions.

Unfortunately, the actuality of the First Noble Truth was simply translated by early Eurocentric Buddhologists, especially by Christ-centric missionaries who first came across the Buddha's Teachings. They translated the First Noble Truth simply as "Life is Suffering." *Dukkha* instead should have been rendered: "Life is full of Stress, Anguish and Misgivings." *Dukkha* means not only physical, but also mental, emotional and moral anguish that result from one's wrong thinking, motivations, speech and behaviors. The underlying reason being that "whatever is impermanent brings about suffering," said the Buddha. He also explained that karma means "we reap what we sow," so we must be committed to sowing the seeds of good karma, not bad ones.

The Second Noble Truth therefore states that "Suffering has its Origins." What this means is that there are physical causes as well as subjective reasons as to why human beings experience psychosomatic problems. The underlying causes and reasons, as

mentioned, are mythologically represented by the three creatures: the wild boar, venomous asp and crowing rooster, each chasing one the other two in a counterclockwise rotation each defying the flow of true and real life. Unenlightened human beings are undeniably full of greed, resentment, jealousy and self vanities.

This is why Sakyamuni taught that "All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts; it is made up of our thoughts" (*Dhammapada I. Praises of the Buddha*. p. 151.) This means that the underlying causes and reasons for suffering are to be found mainly and basically in one's self and not in others or in one's external circumstances alone. In other words, what we say and do are being constantly triggered by the very thoughts we hold in our mind and the desires that are burning in our hearts.

The Third Noble Truth states that once the actual causes and the real reasons have been correctly diagnosed and pinpointed, it is then and only then that a proper treatment can be formulated and applied that accords with a person's specific needs, pain and misery that are unique to him. The treatment and cure has to fit the individual's specific mental, emotional, physical and spiritual condition, and circumstance. You do not administer an "aspirin" to bring down a person's cholesterol level, or treat his heartbreak with chemotherapy.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Way of the Noble Eightfold Path that cures the ills of a person's mind, heart, body and troubled conscience or spirit. Sakyamuni indicated that moral and spiritual solutions are to be found in each individual's heart of hearts. For it is in the very center of a person's heart that one's whole being comes to be permeated by the Dharma's virtues of kindness, generosity, compassion and equanimity. Such a "peace of mind" (*anjin*) is established when one has trusted and taken refuge in Amida's Vow and the virtues in her Sacred Name that "transforms" one's ingratitude into gratitude, arrogance into humility, impertinence into penitence, and his irreverence into repentance.

This then is why Shinran Shonin declared "only the nembutsu is true, real, and sincere," while everything in this transient world as sensed and experienced through one's consciousness is empty, vain and untrue. To be merely sensually conscious implicates an egoism that is being driven by the black boar, the venomous asp, and the crowing rooster.

This is why, said Shinran:

... Amida's Primal Vow does not discriminate between the young and old, good and evil; true entrusting alone is essential. The reason is that the Vow is directed to the being burdened

with the weight of karmic evil and burning with the flames of blind passion.

T. Unno. *Tannisho*. I. p. 5.

For, whether one thinks he is "good" or "bad" is due to his karma and karmic condition. For karma as human beings experience it is the actuality that:

... Under the influence of our karmic past we human beings will do anything. T. Unno. *Tannisho*. XIII. P. 24.

This is why the best of human intentions and generosity often ends in the most unexpected and disastrous of outcomes.

For instance, Einstein's formulation of  $E=mc^2$  led other scientists like Julius Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967) to develop the atomic bomb and Edward Teller (1908-2003) to construct the even deadlier hydrogen bomb. This confirms what are the contagious after-effects of karma in the arena of atomic research and experimentation. The first atomic bomb was detonated on July 16, 1945, in New Mexico at the Trinity test site. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima (August 6, 1945) and Nagasaki (August 9, 1945) were ordered by President Harry S. Truman. Therefore, as of Karmic consequences, these events have now changed how people think, feel and live under the possibility of an all-out nuclear war that could mean the extinction of the human species. All the while the proliferation of nuclear weapons continues.

We all are now, therefore, living in fear of an all-out nuclear war. This is why everything we think, sense, feel, say and do as foolish human beings who think they are in control of the things of nature are undeniably "empty, vain and unreliable." For the deeds of human beings without the Truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness are all tainted by their blind passions, burning resentments and foolish vanities, regardless of whether they be primitives or sophisticated moderns. Most moderns today are not even aware or concerned that their excessive wasteful lifestyles are the karmic consequences of what the "industrial, military congressional complex" (IMCC) has and continues to do.

This is exactly why, said Shinran, we have to believe, trust and take refuge in Amida's Sacred Name that alone is true, real and sincere because it is based on the Truth of Selflessness and the Reality of Togetherness. The reason and basis for this are found in the Larger Sutra on Immeasurable Life as follows:

By virtue of the inconceivable power of the Vow, Amida Buddha devised the Name easy to uphold and pronounce and, thereby, promised to take in all who say the Name. Thus, when we entrust ourselves to the inconceivable power

of Amida's compassionate vow which saves us to deliver us from birth-and-death, and when we realize that the saying of nembutsu occurs because of the Tathagata's working, since our calculation is not involved, we are in accord with the Primal Vow and will be born in the land of True Fulfillment. T. Unno. *loc. cite.*, XI. P. 18.

This is how by trusting and saying Amida's name, we come to see how our thoughts, words and deeds, in reality, are tainted by our past and ongoing transgressions and desecrations of the Dharma itself. Even before we attempt to understand and criticize the thoughts, feelings, words and deeds of others, we each should first awaken to the undeniable truth about our own selves, as did Shinran. This is how he came to utter: "only the nembutsu is true, real and sincere." We should ponder daily the selfless and all-embracing significance of these words as we are about to welcome in the year 2012. By "only," Shinran did not mean that the nembutsu truth of Selflessness and Togetherness was a monopoly of a religion claiming that its teachings and tenets were the only true ones while that of others were false.

## **BUDDHIST PASSAGES & STORIES**

Suppose there is a small piece of wood floating on a vast ocean. The wood has a small hole the size of which is just enough for the head of a turtle to pop into.

There is a long-lived blind sea turtle in the ocean. Once every one hundred years, this turtle comes out from the bottom of the ocean and pops his head into the hole of the wood.

To be able to hear the Dharma is just as hard as for the blind turtle to encounter the small piece of wood on a vast ocean and let its head go through the hole in the wood piece. *Mahaparinirvan Sutra*. Parable of a Blind Turtle in a Vast Ocean.

## **QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER**

QUESTION: Can Amida be equated to the God of Christianity?

ANSWER: No. Amida is not a Creator God. But this does not mean that Buddhists and people of other religious orientations cannot come together to work selflessly for world peace and as human beings to protest the doings of the "Military Industrial Congressional Complex" (MICC) that has become and obviously continues to be beholden to special interest groups and mega-global corporations and banking institutions that control the members of Congress through their respective lobbyists such as the AICAP.

Firstly, Amida Buddha does not discriminate between those who are "good and just" and condemn those who are "evil and unjust" to a fiery inferno.

Secondly, Amida Buddha equally embraces both the "good person" and especially the "evil person" without favoritism. This is implied by the Dharma as having 84,000 gates or pathways leading to it!

Thirdly, Amida especially grasps to embrace never to abandon the "person riddled by karmic evils."

For these reasons, Amida Buddha cannot be equated to the Creator God as described in the Semitic-rooted religions and the God Brahma of Hinduism, who is also seen as a Creator God.

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