



GASSHO

December

2012

Issue No12-12

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



Season's Greetings

MONTH'S THOUGHT



Monotheistic religions show ... a single-minded insistence that it represents the only way to achieve a heavenly outcome for the rest of eternity ... is very centered on the idea of saving one's soul from eternal damnation. The fear-based message ... is used as a recruiting tool by such religions. — Robert Warden, Ph.D., UC-Riverside.



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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR DECEMBER 2012

1st SUN Dec 2nd:

SKM Services Cancelled
Please Attend
HBC "BODHI" DAY SERVICE

2nd SUN Dec 9th:

**Shinshu Kyokai's
BODHI DAY SERVICE**
9 A.M. Eng. Service
Sermon:
"SAKYAMUNI and AMIDA"

3rd SUN Dec 16th:

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

4th SUN Dec 23rd:

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

With Deepest Sympathy

Mrs. Helen T. Kawamoto 88 yrs. Oct. 18, 2012
Mr. Albert Y. Ogasawara 80 yrs. Oct 27, 2012

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

KARAOKE SINGERS CLUB Mon 7 - 9 p.m.
Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

KARATE CLASSES Tues & Fri 6 - 8 p.m.
Shihan - Walter Nishioka

FUJINKAI LADIES' FELLOWSHIP GROUP
Wed 9 a.m. - noon

5th SUN Dec 30th:

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

MONDAY, DEC 31st:

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

TUESDAY, Jan 1st:

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

THANK YOU
for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

2012 Memorial Service Schedule

| | | | | | |
|------|---------|------|---------|------|----------|
| 2011 | 1 Year | 2010 | 3 Year | 2006 | 7 Year |
| 2000 | 13 Year | 1996 | 17 Year | 1988 | 25 Year |
| 1980 | 33 Year | 1963 | 50 Year | 1913 | 100 Year |

IS THE EARTH A CUBE OR A SPHERE?

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Each person ushers out each "old year" to welcome in each "new year" according to her or his ethnic traditions and beliefs. In doing so, each person feels as though the exact moment 00:00 midnight is the same for everyone wherever they may happen to be on this ever turning Earth of ours. However, this precise 00:00 hour is determined by an imagined vertical line on the surface of this Earth called the International Date Line that "zigs" and "zags" its way down the middle of the western half of the Pacific Ocean beginning from the North Pole down between Russia and Alaska, then Japan and Hawaii, New Zealand and Chatham Island and finally down to the South Pole.

Theoretically, such vertical lines (longitudes) from the North Pole crossing the Equator down to the South Pole can be drawn *ad infinitum*. So too *ad infinitum* can be drawn parallel horizontal lines (latitudes) from the eastern to the western rim of the Earth all the way up to the North Pole and all the way down to the South Pole. When a longitude intersects with the Equator, a cross or a plus sign ("+") with equidistant vertical and horizontal arms is formed. It is encircled by the Earth's rim that is a seamless 360° circumference (O).

The upright equidistant lines of the cross form four 90° right angles juxtaposed at the very center of the circle. If they run obliquely, it is called a saltire. The arms of a saltire need not be at right angles (X) as they are in an upright cross or a plus sign. One example is the Flag of Scotland (St. Andrew's Cross). The saltire cross is also a warning sign indicating a "railroad crossing" and can also mean "no smoking" if a cigarette is crossed out. It can also be seen in a diagonal swastika.

For the Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists, the upright swastika means "to be good" by being your "highest self." The Buddhist swastika is mostly on the upright rather than on the diagonal, and when even depicted as a swastika, the angles are

WORDS OF SHINRAN

"... we are full of ignorance and blind passion. Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves. When we who are so shameful, go a step or two, little by little, along the White Path of the power of the Vow, we are taken in and held by the compassionate heart of the Buddha of unhindered light. It is fundamental that because of this we will unfailingly reach the Pure Land of happiness, whereupon we will be brought to realize the same enlightenment of great nirvana as Amida Tathagata, being born in the flower of that perfect enlightenment." – SBT-Series. *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*. p 48.

always 90° at the center. Therefore, the extended ends of a Hindu or Buddhist swastika on its equidistant arms are bent either to the right or to the left are also at 90° angles to indicate whether the swastika (or self) is "turning in the correct clockwise direction or incorrect counterclockwise rotation."

There, therefore, are all kinds of symbols and signs. Visualizing the Wheel of Dharma or the Wheel of Transmigration enables a person to connect her or his conscience (spirituality) to the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness that leads her or him to an "awakening of faith" that connects with things sacred and truths spiritual. They involve the Four Noble Truths based on the uniform and orderly processes of causality, conditionality, interdependency and the facts of karma.

The swastika in India has been used as a religious symbol by the Hindus for more than 3000 years and is thought to be even older than the Egyptian ankh, which is more a symbol of fertility and procreation. The swastika, on the other hand, is a symbol for things sacred and spiritual truths necessary for a person to realize the "higher self. However, Hitler used the swastika (*hakenkreuz*) and set it on a diagonal, "turning" in the counterclockwise rotation against the Truth of Selflessness and the Reality of Togetherness. It was used as a symbol to stand for the superiority of the Aryan or Anglo-Saxon race and as a justification for genocide. Hitler, therefore, utilized

GASSHO is the Monthly Newsletter of

SHINSHU KYOKAI MISSION of HAWAII

1631 S. Beretania Street, Honolulu, Hawaii,
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Editor: Rev. R. K. Tatsuguchi

Circulation: SKM Staff

PUBLICATION DATE: November 26, 2012

what is a benign Hindu symbol for the truth and turned it into an ethnocentric symbol of hate, especially against the Jews (anti-Semitism). The Swastika was originally and still continues to be a symbol for love, peace and non-violence in the Dharmic religions. Hitler turned it into a symbol for violence and destruction to justify his assumption that the Aryan people of Arya in ancient Germany were of a superior race and stock. Incidentally, Hitler's mother was Jewish.

Now, when the Earth in one's imagination is cut right down the middle from the North to the South Pole, you split it much like a musk melon that has been split right down its center from the top to bottom into two vertical halves. The left half flattened out as a map on a tabletop would be the Western Hemisphere and the right half the Eastern Hemisphere. If the Earth is cut horizontally right through at the Equator, it would be like cutting a gigantic playground ball into two horizontal domes. The top half of the Earth would be the Northern Hemisphere in which most of the Earth's land mass lies, and the bottom half would be the Southern Hemisphere where Antarctica and most of the Earth's ocean waters are.

Now, if it were possible to make parallel horizontal cuts of equal width beginning from the Equator up to the North Pole and down to the South Pole, you then would have disc like round cake like layers of the Earth. The largest ones would be just above and below the Equator, because the Earth itself is a sphere and the equator is the largest circumference around it. The subsequent layers would then diminish in size going up to the North and down to the South poles. Then they would become mere dots, or invisible points that are the North and South poles. The ascending and descending parallel horizontal layers upon coming to their northernmost and southernmost points make the Earth appear as though it were made up of disk like cake layers stacked one upon the other rotating around a vertical invisible axis whose ends yet extend unseen beyond the South Pole and the North Pole into the very expanses of the universe that are boundless, expansive and seemingly without limits.

There are 24 hours in a full day. Because there are 12 hours to the day and 12 hours to the night, the Earth is vertically divided into 24 regional time zones bounded between two longitudes. These 24 wedge-like vertical zones form a complete sphere like the wedges of a perfectly round orange. So when these 24 set time zones are flattened out as a map on a table, the width of each time zone would be 15° in width, the widest at the Equator and mere "points" at the Poles ($24 \times 15 = 360$).

As the Earth turns on its vertical axis from west to east, it appears as though the sun is rising over the eastern horizon at dawn and by evening dusk it looks as though it was dropping to finally disappear over the crimson western horizon. Both the "rising sun" and the "setting sun" (including the "noonday sun"), however, are the same sun. The illusion that the sun rises from the eastern horizon to traverse the sky to finally disappear over the western horizon occurs because the Earth itself keeps making a complete revolution in 24 hours while it orbits the sun in 365, days or in the 12 months that make up a year's time. The Earth is going around the sun. It is not the sun that is going around the Earth as is the moon to affect the Earth's ocean's tides.

Now, when the Earth orbits the sun after a year's time, does it stop rotating on its axis to start turning anew once again? Does New Year's Day then begin a new rotation of the Earth? Does the Earth disappear as another new Earth takes its place as caricatured by an aged man with a long beard who departs, being replaced by a diapered new born baby wearing a black top hat?

The time difference between any two time zones is an hour. Each zone is an hour ahead as one travels east and one hour behind as one travels west. Each hour can be divided into 60 minutes, each minute into 60 seconds, each second into split seconds and each split second into milliseconds ad infinitum. So time in this sense would be microscopically and macroscopically endless.

The imaginary International Date Line moves with the Earth as it rotates from west to east. As the Earth rotates from west to east, it turns in the counter clockwise direction, that is, when the North Pole is deemed to be the top of the Earth. But when the South Pole is perceived to be the top of the Earth, then, as it keeps on turning, the Earth will be perceived rotating in the clockwise direction. In both cases, the Earth itself has not stopped spinning on its axis. This is also why when it is Spring in the Northern Hemisphere, it is Autumn in the Southern Hemisphere.

This is also the reason why when you cross the International Date Line from east to west or from the west to east you do not instantly sense the loss or gain of a full 24 hour day. This is because time itself has, is and continues to steadily pass on endlessly at an orderly, uniform rate without any interruptions. The passing of time, therefore, is a seamless, beginningless that is an endless phenomenon that cannot be artificially fragmented into measurable disconnected "ticks" and "tocks" of seconds, minutes or hours as marked

on the face of a clock or a stopwatch. Although the days, nights, months and the years are digitally marked off as units of time, "time" itself steadily marches on at the same uniform and orderly rate wherever you may be on the face of this Earth, or even somewhere in outer space. Though you may count the number of minutes and split seconds on a stopwatch, the time that is ticked off on the stopwatch is not the time that steadily continues to keep passing by.

What this means is that since time is beginningless and endless, the time you are living now in the present cannot be cut off from the times you have lived in the past or will be living in the future. Therefore, your yesterdays and tomorrows are all connected to your todays. This is why you, in each moment, are living and dying as well as dying and living in each present moment. You are "passing" and yet "becoming" the future. Now, however, because the 24 time zones are arbitrary stationary zones set on the face of this earth by man, when it is Saturday in Hawaii, it is already Sunday in Japan. Time zones are static geographical zones which are vertical wedge like sections of the Earth. Living in each time zone, therefore, is a dynamic thing not a static one because the Earth itself keeps turning as it is orbiting the sun. You yourselves are alive and moving about as long as your lungs are breathing and your heart continues pulsating as you yourselves, paradoxically, are dying and living in each passing moment.

Primitive man saw and worshipped the sun as a simple circle. Then it came to be worshipped as a circle with a center point. This circle with a center point then evolved into a circle with rays of light radiating from it. Such depictions of the sun are found in ancient aboriginal as well as pagan cultures in a variety of crude hieroglyphic forms. Children like to draw them also with eyes, a nose and mouth as though the sun had a human face. This symbol of a "circle" also is seen in Pagan goddesses with exaggerated round breasts and even with gaping open vaginas. Such pagan goddesses, according to Carl G. Jung, were worshipped often with their male consorts as deities or archetypes of the union of opposites, male and female energies known in Taoism as *yin* and *yang*. Female goddesses can range from angelic fairy godmothers to demonic wicked witches. So too can male gods be benevolent as well as malevolent.

The "plus sign" (+) encircled by a circumference (O) also indicates things such as the cardinal points of the compass or the four basic elements, or the four seasons. In Taoism the symbol for *yin yang* referred to above symbolizes the unity and inseparability of opposites by

SHINRAN'S WASAN

Immeasurable is Wisdom's Light!
All beings with burdens heavy,
Not one is not illuminated
by its Brilliant Radiance!
Therefore, entrust your selves,
take refuge in this Light!

Jodo Wasan No. 4
rkt trans.

blending them such as light and darkness, male and female, positive and negative, and so forth. In the Tibetan mandala it represents both the world of nirvana and samsara.

If the point at the exact center of the Earth is multi-directionally extended and expanded vertically, horizontally, diagonally and in every conceivable direction possible through the Earth's spherical surface and beyond into the expansive unfathomable universe, this center point of the Earth then becomes connected with all the infinite number of points in the known and unknown cosmos (the "ten endless directions"). Each point, because of causality, conditionality and interdependency, is seamlessly and endlessly connected to all other points in our multi-dimensional and multiplex universe, much of it a mystery which still is baffling and mind-boggling.

Much of these infinitesimal points and connections, because they are unseen, have and continue to confound the human mind (scientism) and mystify the heart (occultism). However, empirically, pragmatically, philosophically and religiously, all points in the cosmic universe are constantly converging into the very center of a person's "heart of hearts" to transform a person's consciousness into her or his "conscienceness." Such then is the significance of the Dharma's Selflessness as being Inconceivable that is also its Togetherness is Immeasurable.

When a person's awareness is so expanded beyond the limits of her or his sensory consciousness into the universe's Zenith, such a person becomes, then, aware of things characterized by the Timeless Truth of the Dharma's Selflessness (*Dharmakaya-as-Suchness*). When a person's consciousness is extended below into the Nadir of the universe, it becomes suffused by the selfsame Dharma's Eternal Reality of Togetherness and awakened to things sacred (*Dharmakaya-as-Compassion*). When it is extended beyond the

eastern or western horizon, one's spirit or "conscience-ness" becomes then fully aware that the cosmos above, below, the sides and all around this Earth of ours has been, is and yet will continue to be embraced and always within the universe's benevolence and the Earth's beneficence. In becoming so "awakened," one's "ingratitude" becomes transformed into one's "gratitude."

This transformation is "instantaneous" and somewhat like when you cross the International Date Line from the east to the west, when you instantly lose a full 24 hour day. And when you cross back over to the east side, once again, instantly you gain a full 24 hour day. You do not physically or psychologically sense this loss or gain because the Date Line is nonexistent, an illusion. But the speed of sunlight and the Earth's turning remains steadfast and the same. This is because causality is an orderly, uniform process without prejudice, discrimination or partiality. So, when you cross the Date Line from east to west or from the west to east, this is why you do not experience or feel that you have lost or gained a full 24 hour day.

So, it is interesting to note that in Mandarin Chinese, the ideogram for the universe is called *yuz-hou* (*yu* "space" + *zhou* "time," *J. u-chuu*), implying that "time" and "space" are inseparable phenomena. Now interestingly, Einstein's theory of relativity concerns the linear accelerations and decelerations of time and space, that matter and energy are different forms of the same thing (i.e., *nirvana* and *samsara*, Buddha and man, etc.) Matter can be "transformed" into energy and energy can be transformed into matter in terms of time and space relationships in relation to the speed of light.

So the ideographic compound *yu-zhou* becomes quite fascinating calligraphy under Einstein's theory of relativity in which matter, time and space are regarded in terms of time and space in relation to the speed of light. Einstein's formula ($E = mc^2$) tells us that the *amount* of energy a given mass contains, if it were suddenly all turned into pure energy, its dispersion rate would be obtained by multiplying the mass by the square of the speed of light which is 300,000,000 meters per second. This phenomena can perhaps be seen as being the difference between charcoal gradually burning and when charcoal has been combined with saltpeter and sulfur becomes a black powder, when ignited instantly becomes a powerful blast.

The configuration of a "circle" with a cross in the center has been found in the drawings and art of primitive and pagan peoples even before it came to be appropriated by other ancient peoples, which was then finally appropriated by Christians

to represent the cross on which Jesus was crucified. The Roman instrument of execution, however, was actually an upright "T" on which criminals were nailed to hang and die a slow, torturous, painful, cruel death for public viewing! It was not a "†" with the vertical bar which in a crucifix is longer than the horizontal bar.

The crucifix with two horizontal cross bars stands for the crucified body of Christ and two angels. Some crucifixes have a halo around the nexus of the cross with rays radiating from it. Biblical scholars have determined that this radiating halo is the Pagan's symbol for the "sun" as revered by primitives and ancients. This "sun god" symbol was incorporated into the crucifix on which Jesus, born as the "son of man," then was crucified as the "Lamb of God" who was the "Only Begotten Son of God" by immaculate conception. This is why in Roman Catholicism, there is a halo around the very center of the crucifix that is actually the symbol of the sun worshipped in pagan religions, or the "Light of the World."

The distance between two opposite points directly across each other on a circumference is the diameter of a circle. This line is a straight line. But each point on the circumference of a circle cannot be distinguished from the points next to it or from all the other interlinking points because each point on a circumference is contiguous with all the other points of the circle that makes up its circumference. There is no point on it that can be called the beginning or the ending point (the Tibetan "seamless knot"). In other words, no one point on a circle's circumference is superior to the others for they are all unseen points found converging in the very center and heart of things living and nonliving that are of sacred and spiritual significance.

Life visualized as such a center point of a circle is also stands for the "awakening" that "one is living and yet dying, and that "as one is dying one is also living." All lives (points on and within and beyond the Earth into the Boundless Universe) are results of ceaseless births and deaths. Life, in reality, is not simply a matter of just one person's birth or death. They were other lives before one was born just as much as there will be countless other lives after one's death. Each life is linked to all the other lives that are links that are interlinked in the "Golden Chain of Love" just as all the points in a circle's circumference are.

Thus, for me, I like to think and contemplate the Dharma as being a "circumference-less circle" by visualizing a "multi-dimensional unbounded sphere" that suggests that the universe itself is comprised of a myriad number of incalculable

points whose numbers are indeterminable and unfathomable. Therefore, if you are only connecting two points at a time, then all you are doing is drawing straight lines with opposite ends ("me" and "you," or "it's either you or me"). If you are only connecting the points that form a square or a cube, then you end up with pointed corners and cutting edges that are slicing that divide "us from them" or what is "ours is ours, not yours."

The fact that the vertical lines (longitudes) and horizontal lines (latitudes) as well as the national boundaries on a map actually do not exist, this fact was especially confirmed by Ellison Onizuka (1946-1986) when he first saw the living planet Earth from the spaceship Discovery as it orbited the Earth as does the moon also. In awe and wonderment, he exclaimed:

The earth is a beautiful thing!
There are no lines
 or boundaries on it!
It is a fragile thing.
We must learn to care for it!

Indeed, these words of Onizuka take on now even more of a greater significance in a world that is now faced with increasingly complex, divisive economic, territorial and political issues characterized by perennial wars.

Therefore, let us once again ponder the words of a male voice that prefaces the vocalist sings the song *Haha wo Shinobu (In Fondly Remembering My Mom)* as follows:

People are born stark naked
 without a thing in this world!
Then, they cry and laugh
 and even get quite angry.
They also become attached
 to things and people!
Thus, they become fearful
 of losing what they have
 and the people they love!
Then, once again, they become
 stark naked without a thing
To continue their
 upward spiritual journey
 in the Great Unknown
 beyond this world of ours.

Then, when the female vocalist finishes, the male voice concludes with the words,

Hoping to be born,
 and yet not born.
Not wanting to be born,
 And yet already born!

These words, first of all, tell us that we had no choice as to whether we were or were not to be born into this world. Nor did we have a choice as to who our parents would be. But, mysteriously, suddenly here we are, laughing, crying or getting angry at each other for whatever reasons.

So how then are we then to live our lives as human beings blessed and endowed with a brain, heart and a conscience? Are we to live our lives by hurting and harming things and others who we perceive to be our adversaries, foes or enemies in vying for the world's lands and resources? Or, are we to shut ourselves in the confines of our squared, cubed or even spherical airtight cocoons by shutting out all others who we deem to be offensive, repulsive, useless, threatening and dangerous?

Or, are we to live our lives in gratitude and humility by being helpful and healing instead of being hurtful and harmful. We can do this by striving and working to bring the opposites of a line in our lives and fusing the loose ends together into "seamless circles without circumferences" to be permeated by the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness. Instead of being a square with sharp corners and cutting edges or a circular saw with "buzzing" sharp points cross cutting or rip sawing every thing into pieces and segments, we, instead, should become selfless all-embracing spheres of "conscienceness" without jagged points or cutting edges. We should become spheres without such sharp or jagged teeth or slicing edges.

However the task is most formidable in that we human beings are complex creatures, much like the trickster wearing a hat with many facets, like a front side, back side, top side, under side, left side and a right side that keep changing as the stage and actors keep changing. There are aspects to our selves that even we ourselves are not even aware of because we are in denial and not ready to admit that we have such sorrowful and shameful dimensions to our selves. This is especially so in our subconscious and unconscious persons.

Oh! ... how easily and quickly we forget our past follies and foibles and live as though what is only happening in the present moment dictates what we should be thinking, feeling, saying and doing. This is why we are indifferent and insensitive as to how our past thoughts, words and actions are having their effects on the present and how the present will be affecting the future.

More importantly, we are not quite aware of how we are being unfailingly sustained by the unseen things and forces that are eternally sacred and timelessly spiritual. Regardless of our

transgressions and desecrations, they constantly are converging into our consciousness and conscience as Infinite Light and Immeasurable Life. To be living in one's self illusions and ego delusions is much like enjoying the light of dazzling neon lights in the darkness of night and yet unable to see the unseen electrical energy and currents that make all the electrical appliances and electronic gadgets in our everyday life operational.

If we do not join and fuse the positive and negative loose ends of our lives into seamless circles and choose to remain in the "squared circles" or cubicles of our egos, then, as of consequence, we will be living like an inch-worm laboriously boring in the hollow darkness between the endless joints of a bamboo that keep tapering down to a dead ending point. Or, worse yet, if we become like a parasitical tapeworm, then, we will endlessly be consuming things at one end while constantly discarding wastes at the other (a consummate consumer). Such a tapeworm-like life is characterized by excessiveness and wastefulness that is damaging to the very Earth that we depend on for our very existence and well being.

If this is the case, we are failing to live our lives like a migratory water bird that gets up at the crack of each morning's dawning light to soar and glide freely in the unobstructed skies to follow the "rising sun" that leads it day after day in a "westerly direction" toward its final "Home of Homes."

A migratory water bird with stilt like legs follows the lead of each day's dawning sun. And as evening falls, it swoops down to alight gently in the waters of another lake on its way without mudding or disturbing its still waters. After drinking and feeding in its shallows, it goes to sleep with its head under one wing while standing on one of its stilt like legs with the other bent and resting on it. Then, at the crack of the next morning's dawning light, it takes flight once again to continue its westward journey until its final sunset when it fearlessly and naturally continues to follow the setting sun as it disappears over the western horizon into where all is a Golden Radiance full of Warmth and Serenity.

I like to think of this "passing over the horizon" to be somewhat like when one is crossing over the International Dateline where one senses no difference between yesterday, today and tomorrow. The Brilliance of Amida's Pure Land, in other words, is not a burning or incinerating one. Nor is Life there a searing or scalding one. For it is an Inconceivable Truth and Ineffable Reality of all past, present and future times, seamless and inseparable.

This final passing over and into the western horizon (or Pure Land) can also be likened to a raindrop breaking out of a dark storm cloud that has fallen into the vast, boundless, unfathomable ocean that has become its very unobstructed waters and free flowing currents. In having done so, it has not become obliterated or destroyed, though not a trace of its former "rain-drop-ness" can be seen. This also can be seen to be much like a migratory bird as it feeds and drinks in the shallows of a lake whose tracks on or beneath the lake's waters surface do not disturb or muddy its waters.

Now, the point being made in the raindrop analogy is that, like a raindrop that has disappeared in the ocean, a person in passing into the Great Unknown Beyond seems to disappear. But, in doing so, a person, like a raindrop, is not being ejected, rejected or repulsed by the Dharma Ocean (*Hok'kaï*). Instead, like the raindrop that has fallen into the ocean a person upon entering the Dharma Ocean, instantly becomes part and parcel of its very waters and currents of "unobstructed freedom."

However, because of your past karma, if you have become like a mountainous frozen iceberg, it will take you a great deal longer to melt down to become the very waters of the ocean though you, without realizing it, are already, like a mountainous iceberg is melting in the Dharma Ocean. This, then, are the meanings of "Buddha and man are of one Essence" as well as "*Nirvana* and *samsara* are two sides of the Singular Coin of Existence," which is much like the ocean embracing all icebergs in it without rejections until the last one of them melts and completely becomes its very waters and currents.

What awaits us all over the western horizon is the very Brilliant, Crimson, Golden Radiance of *Nirvana* without residues (*mui nehan*), meaning the World of Dharma without discriminations or condemnations. In the Pure Land texts, *Nirvana* is described more as a warming and consummating radiance rather than a searing Brilliance that is incinerating. This is because the Light there illuminates to clarify much like the sun melting down an iceberg in the ocean to become its very waters and currents.

The Radiance of the Dharma Sun, therefore, does not incinerate things into ashes. Its Light as the Dharma Moon transforms darkness into light as an illumination to reveal the hidden shadows in our very being. The Life there also is not just for human beings but for all sentient beings, regardless of whether, in our spiritual ignorance, we see them as either "good" or "evil." This nature of non-discrimination in the Pure Land is like the ocean

taking in all hailstones and raindrops and not only crystal clear icicles and lily white snowflakes to become its very waters of Selflessness and currents of Togetherness.

This non-rejection is affirmed by Shinran Shonin's words as follows:

Amida's Primal Vow does not discriminate between the young and old, good and evil; The reason is that the Vow is directed to the being burdened with the weight of karmic evil and burning with the flame of blind passion. *Tannisho* Ch. 1.

This is why the Light of the Dharma's Selflessness and its Life of Togetherness have never been or can ever be the monopoly of any one man, race, culture, creed, religion or historical period or specific geographical site. This is because Amida is the ultimate manifestation of the Dharma's Light of Truth that Selflessly shines equally on all things and beings to illuminate the fact that they have, are and yet are constantly being grasped and embraced never to be abandoned until they all are freed from their burden of irreversible karmic evils (transgressions and desecrations). This is the fundamental significance of Amida's Vows. Amida, thereby, is the ultimate manifestation of the Dharma's Reality manifesting the Dharma's Life of Togetherness that has, is and yet continues to embrace all things and life forms on the Earth here and everywhere throughout the universe without discriminations or favoritism.

I would now like to translate the first and third verses to the song *Akai Yuuhi no Furusato* (My Birthplace Village's Sunset). The reason why is because the song mentions a migratory water bird upon its "final sunset" fearlessly following the "setting sun" over the western horizon to disappear into the Brilliant Golden Crimson Radiance that is the Great Unknown Beyond. This disappearance also can be seen as all kinds of rivers flowing and returning into the ocean to become its very waters and currents.

The first and third verses can be translated as follows:

They keep calling and beckoning me
To return to my Home of Homes
 where all is a Crimson Radiance!
A solitary, meandering traveler
 All alone on the road of life,
Like a migratory water bird
 following the setting sun
 over the Western horizon.
Though a foolish person I am,

those rivers and mountains
keep calling and beckoning,
for me to return home.

As I listen to their voices
I can hear them calling me!

They keep calling and telling me
"Return to your Home of Homes
 a golden, crimson radiance."
Flowing with tears as I stand
 tip toe on my toes,
I can see the crimson sun leading
 a migratory water bird
 calling out to me also to return.
Oh clouds so golden and bright,
 if you are going there also,
Please carry my love and regards
 on your fluffy crimson shoulders
 to my mom already there!

The migratory water bird in this song caught my special attention. This is because we all are like lone migratory water birds soaring in the open skies during the day (*maya*), but, at night, we fall asleep in a lake like a migratory water bird standing on one leg. And as we are sleeping, we continue to dream in the night's total darkness (*avidya*). Like migratory birds, you and I are on a spiritual journey heading in a "westerly direction" to enter, when our final sunsets come, our final Home of Homes where all is a Crimson Golden Radiance that is not an illumination that incinerates.

Furthermore, a migratory water bird with stilt-like legs does not make ripples or disturbances as it descends at dusk into the waters of another lake on its westerly journey. It then alights gently into its calm shallow waters without making a sound. Then, the bird, in drinking and feeding, steps about carefully and gently without making a ripple or disturbance. Then, as soon as the night's darkness blankets the land, the bird goes to sleep for the night standing on one of its thin stilt like legs with its head tucked under a wing so as not to muddy the waters.

For me, such a vision of a lone migratory water bird on one of its stilt like legs depicts the life of non-violence as recommended by the Buddha. Such a bird tells us that it is better to be helpful and healing rather than to be hurting and harming. In fact the kanji for the west (*nishi*) is a pictogram of such a migratory bird asleep with its head tucked under one of its wings with its front side pointing in a westerly direction sleeping as it stands on just one leg in the shallows of a lake without making a disturbance. To stand just on one leg balanced and steadfast, facing and heading in a "westerly direction," for me, this depicts a person of O-nembutsu faith.

Therefore, let us in our present lives focus on the life of "non-violence" that avoids transgressing the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness which also is not to desecrate its Reality of Togetherness. This realization especially arises by reflecting on what are the grave consequences of our having committed what are the Five Deadly Transgressions and desecrations of "Right Dharma" as indicated by the "exclusion clause" appended to the 18th Vow of Amida.

This Vow paradoxically, was made to save such beings who have already committed such transgressions and desecrations by embracing them all by vowing never to abandon them. Amida keeps "awakening" them to make them realize that it is because of their past and continuing transgressions and desecrations that they are being grasped never to be rejected or abandoned because of her Great Benevolence and Beneficence that cannot forsake or reject them.

Now a person in denial of Amida's Light that is Pure Wisdom and her Life that is Unconditional Compassion is much like a pupae in the darkness of its cocoon woven out of the webs of its own selfishness, resentments and vanities that has shut out the rays of the sun. As of consequence, such a person continues to live in the darkness of his or her cocoon without realizing that it has, is and continues to be unwaveringly warmed and nurtured by the sun until such time that we are to break out like a butterfly to soar in the open skies of "unobstructed freedom." The exclusion clause, therefore, indicates that such is yet not the case for those who keep transgressing the sacredness of life and who continue to defile and desecrate the Dharma and therefore, are unaware of the gravity of their transgressions and desecrations.

As the year 2013 rapidly approaches, let us continue to deepen our appreciation and understanding of what the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness being manifest as Amida's Vows and Sacred Name that makes possible the life of O-nembutsu and what such a life is all about. Let us all continue to avoid thoughts, words and actions that are piercing and cutting, for they are hurtful and harmful. Let us strive to be helpful and healing in whatever we are thinking, saying and doing. Namoh-amida-butsu.

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

... an old man asked: "Does an enlightened man fall into cause-effect or not?"
The Master (*Pai-chang Huai-hai*, 720-814)

answered, "He does not obscure (ignore or obliterate) cause-effect." ... The meaning of this story is this: The enlightened man allows the law of causation, moral or physical, to take its course, that is, he submits to it, he does not sever himself from it, he does not make any distinction between it and himself, he becomes it, he is it.... — D.T. Suzuki. *The Essence of Buddhism*. pp. 36, 37.

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: Is Amida Buddha God?

ANSWER: According to *Jodo Shinshu Handbook for Laymen*, the answer is "No," because "Amida Buddha, unlike God, does not control man's destiny ..." Nor does a Buddha inflict "punishment" on "... those who do not follow the will of God ..." (p. 15). Furthermore, "Buddha ... works with compassion within a man's heart to convert [actually transform] his ignorant mind into an awakened one so that all may become Buddhas" (p. 16, [] mine).

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