

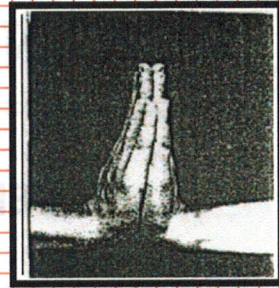
GASSHO

February

2014

Issue No: 02-14

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



NEMBUTSU RECITATION BY COMPULSION? OR BY GRATITUDE?

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

As sequel to last month's GASSHO I would like to continue discussing the significance of what an "awakening of true and real faith" is. When a person trusts and takes complete refuge in Amida Buddha, such a person is never condemned, rejected or abandoned. Such a person, in that very moment, is instantly illuminated by the Light of the Dharma's Selfless Wisdom and simultaneously embraced by its virtues of All-embracing Compassion. Such a person in being so illuminated and grasped just as she or he is with all her or his failings and imperfections, then, as of natural consequence, begins uttering Amida's Name, *Namoh-amida-butsu*, in gratitude, humility and a penitence brimming over with sheer joy. The reason being that such a person, by virtue of Amida's Benevolence, has become established in the Rightly Established State, a person assured of Buddhahood.

Such a person's subsequent utterances of *Namoh-amida-butsu*, being uncontrived, are not "coerced." They are utterances that are spontaneous and natural. They are not culturally or ethnocentrically conditioned reactions or responses characterized by thoughts or feelings of uncertainty as to whether one is going to be punished by some supreme deity's wrath. Nor are they characterized by anxieties as to whether one is going to a "heaven" or going to be condemned to a "hell."

The penitence "awakened" by Amida's Wisdom and Compassion concerns one's whole being becoming transformed by the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness that makes one's whole being to brim over with joy and gladness.

MONTH'S THOUGHT



"... In each culture there exist beliefs and traditions which cannot be traced to human sources. These messages are accepted by the population as if they were messages from God, or messages from a mythological figure, or as if they were an expression of the nature of things. ..." — Jurgen Ruesch. "Communication and Human Relations" (Ruesch & Bateson. *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry.* pp. 41, 42.)



Such a transformation continues to be ongoing until one's last breath of life whereupon one steps into the Pure Land. As mentioned in prior GASSHOs, the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness have, are and continue to appear and be manifest in man's consciousness as Amida Buddha's Inconceivable Infinite Wisdom and Unfathomable Boundless Compassion. Wisdom is the Selfless Light that illuminates the darkness in all beings without favoritisms. Compassion is the Reality that sustains all things and life in a relationship that is sacred and spiritual that is without rejections, to reveal that all things are inseparable. All sentient beings without exception or condemnation, therefore, are illuminated by this Inconceivable Light to become fully embraced in its Immeasurable Life. No thing or form of life is excluded in this Light and Life wherein all things and life forms are inter-linked and "inseparably" One.

This Light being full of Selfless Wisdom is also a Life full of All-embracing Compassion. This Light and Life constantly have, are and continue to

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR FEBRUARY 2014

1st SUN FEB 2nd:

9 A.M. English Service
Dharma Talk
NIRVANA DAY
for Children and Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

2nd SUN FEB 9th:

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

10:30 A.M. **Annual
General Membership
Meeting**
&

**New Year party
and welcoming
Rev. Hidehito Sakamoto**

3rd SUN FEB 16th:

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

4th SUN FEB 23rd:

MONTHLY FAMILY WORSHIP
Dharma Talk
for Children & Adults

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

With Deepest Sympathy

Mrs. Yoshiko Fukuchi
101 yrs. Dec. 31, 2013

Miss Mildred M. Muramoto
89 yrs. Jan 6, 2014

THANK YOU
for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

2014 Memorial Service Schedule

2013	1 Year	2012	3 Year	2008	7 Year
2002	13 Year	1998	17 Year	1990	25 Year
1982	33Year	1965	50 Year	1915	100 Year

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Shinshu Kyokai's new assistant minister, **Rev. Hidehito Sakamoto**, comes to Hawaii from Reedley Buddhist Church in California, where he served as Resident Minister since 2012. He was a Kyoshi minister at the Los Angeles Honpa Hongwanji. Originally, he is from the Saimyoji Temple in Japan.

work in tandem to sustain and nurture all things and forms of life in the ceaseless cycle of births and deaths. "... Thus plants, trees and land all attain Buddhahood" said Shinran (*SBT-Series. Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*. p. 42). What these words of Shinran mean is that even persons "riddled by passions and vanities," upon trusting and taking complete refuge in Amida Buddha's Benevolence and Beneficence, become "awakened" that they have, are or will experience a sudden "awakening" and become "aware" that they are being led to their final Buddhahood. Amida Buddha, therefore, is not a deity who rewards "good people" and punishes "bad people," or rejects "sinners." This

GASSHO is the Monthly Newsletter of
SHINSHU KYOKAI MISSION of HAWAII
1631 S. Beretania Street, Honolulu, Hawaii,
96826-1105. Temple 973-0150.

Editor: Rev. R.K. Tatsuguchi.
Circulation: SKM Staff.

PUBLICATION DATE: January 26, 2014

WORDS OF SHINRAN

"At every moment, in all of us who are foolish and ignorant, greed and desire constantly defile any goodness of heart and anger and hatred incessantly consume the dharma-treasure. ... All our deeds must be termed good acts poisoned and irresolute acts empty, transitory, and false; they cannot be called true, real, and sincere. ..." *Kyogoshinsho*. SSZ II. 62.

point concerning Jodoshinshu faith needs to be made very clear.

Such inner transformations are not matters of public confessions for others to see, affirm or to be analyzed as defined by some external authority or institutionalized religion. Such inner thoughts of penitence and profound feelings of joy cannot be externally displayed for others to see, affirm or deny. For, one's innermost thoughts and deepest feelings cannot be seen because they are "matters of the innermost heart" and not "matters of the whimsical brain." Therefore, to reiterate, this point concerning Jodoshinshu faith and penitence has to and needs to be made very clear, that expressions of penitence in Jodoshinshu are not public confessions of one's contritions to be witnessed, confirmed or affirmed by others.

Therefore, in the confines of this article, I wish to deal with what I see to be the underlying difference between "recitations of nembutsu" that are supplications or petitions to Amida Buddha for some kind of divine intervention or miracle which differ from what are heartfelt "utterances" of one's ineffable gratitude and penitence brimming over with gladness for having been grasped, never to be condemned and abandoned until one attains one's Buddhahood after one's death. As Shinran noted, in the former a "self is working" to obtain something for one's personal advantage, be it material or spiritual! In the latter, a person keeps acknowledging her or his undeservingness as a recipient of Amida's Benevolence and Beneficence.

Therefore, when one recites or chants *Namoh-amida-butsu* as a prayer for some kind of personal benefit or miracle, such recitations of O-nembutsu then entail calculative and contrived

pre-meditations wherein one's spiritual ego is working. For in such utterances of *Namoh-amida-butsu* one is trying to obtain one's own personal advantage and benefits. Such recitations of *O-nembutsu* "entrap" a person in a "self-centered ego working" basically to obtain personal rewards and/or avoid punishment.

In mystical and occult Buddhist traditions such as in Shingon and Tibetan Buddhism, the central aim for an aspirant is to shatter her or his illusory self besieged by blinding passions and vanities of an ego self. The goal in Jodoshinshu (or Shin Buddhism), by contrast, is to "awaken" to the actuality that one is hopelessly riddled by karmic transgressions of things sacred as well as desecrations of truths that are timelessly spiritual. It is an "awakening" in which one has become aware that the consequences of such transgressions and desecrations are irreversible and that this is exactly why one has, is and continues to be grasped by Amida never ever to be abandoned until one's awakening, enlightenment and final Buddhahood is attained upon one's arrival in the Pure Land.

This is exactly the reason why Shinran Shonin said:

"The Primal Vow (or Amida's Sacred Name: *Namoh-amida-butsu*) was established out of deep compassion for us who cannot be freed from the bondage of birth-and-death through any religious practice, due to the abundance of blind passion. Since its basic intention is to effect the enlightenment of such an evil one, the evil person who entrusts himself to Other Power is truly the one who attains birth in the Pure Land. Thus, even the good person attains birth, how much more so the evil person." Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. III. p. 8.

These words of Shinran make it very clear that "transformation" by power of Amida's Wisdom and her virtues of Compassion does not discriminate between a "good person" to reward or to set her or him apart from the "evil person" who is condemned to be punished. Both are equally grasped and embraced and are being transformed by the powers of the Dharma's Selfless Wisdom and virtues of All-embracing Compassion that are constantly manifest as Amida Buddha's Sacred Name: *Namoh-amida-butsu*.

All one needs to do is to entrust one's karma

riddled self by taking refuge in Amida's Benevolence by uttering and repeating his Sacred Name: *Namoh-amida-butsu*. For Amida is a parent who does not punish his or her child because the child has cut himself and is bleeding to death. A parent, instead, quickly stops the bleeding, applies the medicine and wraps the wound in a bandage full of warmth and love and nurses the child until the wound is fully healed.

Therefore, the difference between reciting *Namoh-amida-butsu* in which one's self is working and contriving as contrasted to one's spontaneous utterances of *Namoh-amida-butsu* in which one's self is not working and calculating, this difference is most significant between a "faith" based on "self power" from a faith awakened by the "Other Power." This difference between recitations of *nembutsu* as supplication asking to be helped and utterances of *nembutsu* as "thanksgiving" for having been bandaged and embraced in the compassion of a parent has to be made very clear. This is because the goal of the Sakyamuni Buddha's teaching about Amida Buddha is for all sentient beings to become enlightened and be free of pain and suffering.

According to Jodoshinshu, expressions of *Namoh-amida-butsu* in which one's self is working and contriving, such recitations are called *jiriki nenbutsu*, or recitations of *Namoh-amida-butsu* based on one's own efforts and virtues presumed to be moral and pure. On the other hand, expressions of *nenbutsu* that are spontaneous expressions of heartfelt gratitude and penitence are called *tarikji*, or utterances of *Namoh-amida-butsu* in which one's self is not working and contriving. Such utterances of *nenbutsu* are seen as being all due to the workings of Amida's Benevolence and Beneficence called "Other Power." Therefore, they are not the result of our calculations or workings.

A further distinction of utterances of *Namoh-amida-butsu* that are expressive of one's gratitude and penitence is that in such utterances "one's self is not working." The presumption that one is deserving of Amida's Benevolence because of one's upright moral life and doing of good deeds, such self presumptions are missing. Usually, in such a person of presumptions there also is a subconscious assumption that "evil persons" deserve to be punished. Such persons believe that evil persons are to be consigned to some kind of hell in the name of "justice" and "righteousness." By contrast, in utterances of pure gratitude and penitence such

judgments and condemnations of others are not to be found. For in genuine utterances of Amida's Sacred Name, one's mind of illusions and heart of delusions have been fully penetrated by the Sincere Mind of Amida and her Heart of Compassion that illumines our transgressions for us to see. At the same time, Amida has, for this reason, already embraced us, never to abandon to forsake or reject us!

This difference between a person in whom "a self is working and contriving" contrasted to a person in whom "a judgmental and condemnatory self is not working," this is most in the words of Shinran as follows:

"... the people of the world constantly say, even the evil person attains birth, how much more so the good person. Although this appears to be sound at first glance, it goes against the intention of the Primal Vow of Other Power. The reason is since the person of self power, being conscious of doing good, lacks the thought of entrusting himself completely in Other Power, he is not the focus of the Primal vow of Amida. But when he turns over self-power and entrusts himself to Other Power, he attains birth in the land of True Fulfillment." *Ibid.*

Therefore, where such "a judgmental self is working and contriving" one finds a person full of convictions as to who or what is "good" or "evil." Such perceptions as to who are good and who are evil trigger not only external conflicts but also internal conflicts. Therefore, there is a definite moral-ethical split between persons who see themselves as "good persons" who deserve to go to a "heaven," from who see "evil persons" deserving to be cast into a "hell," and "everlasting fire."

According to Shinran, nembutsu utterances that are sincere, true and real, arise out of one being made "aware" that it is exactly because one undeniably is a hopeless "unsavable being" riddled by karmic evils that Amida Buddha already has, is and continues to embrace one never to reject or abandon her or him. For this reason, Amida's Benevolence and Beneficence are beyond human understanding and comprehension.

Therefore, in Jodoshinshu or Shin Buddhism the term "Great Practice" has to do with the Great Effort and Workings of Amida Buddha's Wisdom and

SHINRAN'S WASAN

Those making self-power primary
and not relying on the Buddha's
inconceivability of his Wisdom,
Are reborn in a womb like palace
for some five hundred years
In its total darkness as though
cut off from the Three Gems
and Amida's Great Compassion.

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 80
rkt trans.

her Compassion that has been consummated through the 48 Vows. As of consequence, Amida constantly is working to grasp and embrace the "good person" and most especially the "evil person" to save them without discriminations and favoritisms.

The word "practice" comes from the Greek language meaning "correct action and activity." In the West, it has come to mean the practice of justice to distinguish between right and wrong, and therefore to distinguish what is good from evil! So, in Judaism and Christianity, morality or religious practice has to do with obeying God's commandments that need to be absolutely upheld, otherwise one must suffer the anger and wrath of God's punishments.

By contrast and comparison, to follow the Eightfold Noble Path and to be upholding the minimal five precepts for laity, these practices are governed by the orderly and uniform laws of causality, conditionality, interdependency and inseparability that karmically govern one's thoughts, words and actions. Karma is also the undeniable fact that there are always consequences to what one has said and done because of the thoughts in one's mind and sentiments harbored in one's heart.

Therefore, a close examination of the Noble Eightfold Path reveals the following "inseparable" triadic causal and karmic relationships: the inseparability between one's "thoughts, words and actions"; the inseparability between one's "mind, body and spirit with one's immediate surroundings"; and the inseparability between the Dharma's "Wisdom, Morality and Meditation," or what are the *Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya* and *Nirmanakaya*.

All genuine religions emphasize the need to live a moral life, pursue ethical virtues and be guided by ultimate spiritual truths. Buddhist discipline based on prescribed beliefs and pre-determined rituals, such practices according to Shin Buddhism are called "ways based on self power," meaning practices in which one's "moralistic ego is working!"

Such worship, procedures and rituals based on "self reliance" are also believed to have magical and miraculous powers such as in ritualized invocations and solemn acts of sanctification. Such rules and practices are sanctioned and enforced by external means designed to control the acts of human beings. In ancient times, if rules of sanctity and spirituality were broken, the punishment was death by stoning or immolation. When such sacerdotal beliefs, rules and regulations become enshrined, they instill a zealousness that can easily become a burning ardor and passion fueled by dogmatism that easily turns into fanaticism.

Now Shinran's "awakening of true and real faith" (*shinjin*) was based on the Buddha's teachings concerning Amida Buddha. As I often repeat, "what Sakyamuni Buddha taught" was undergirded and governed by the inexorable, orderly, uniform laws (or processes) of causation, conditionality, interdependency, inseparability and the effects and affects of personal as well as collective karma.

In other words, what a given individual is thinking and intending are also influenced and affected by one's desires and sentiments, especially by one's willfulness and foolish vanities. These in turn trigger what one says and does which keep bringing about inevitable effects and affects that are irreversible. Such ingrained notions, ideas and beliefs become expressed as words and actions that leave unseen "memory traces" in a person's deepest unconscious. When these memory traces are triggered, they become conscious once again in our ongoing thoughts, words and deeds to become realities. Such recollections then emerge as living images once again to affect our ongoing conscious thoughts, words and actions that leave in their wake further memory traces.

Therefore, whatever a person senses through her or his five sense organs become processed through a person's brain to become colored and blemished by one's ego, ethnicity, cultural upbringing and especially by one's personal likes and dislikes. Thus, one's "self working"

involves one's "luggage" of personal reasons and rationalizations that keep becoming the very things that one keeps saying and doing over and over. In being so repeated, our likes and dislikes are further conditioned and reinforced to become habits hard to break. Such is also the meaning of "ceaseless births and deaths" that can be appreciated by the adage, "The more things change, the more things remain the same."

However, a person's overall consciousness (mind-heart-body-spirit complex) is primarily affected more by what the person herself or himself sees and hears in terms of her or his self-centered self constantly working to find instant gratifications, personal satisfactions and the affirmations of one's ethnic and social peers. In other words, whatever sensations touch a person affects her or his thoughts, feelings and desires, which in turn determine one's verbal reactions and body responses in accordance to one's personal likes and dislikes. Thus the significance of ocular and facial cues and bodily posturings.

For this reason Shinran said, "Under the influence of our karmic past we human beings will do anything" (Tannisho XIII). These words of Shinran clearly confirm Charles Darwin's observations of flora and fauna, whereupon he concluded that all forms of sentient life can survive to continue their kind only by feeding on the lives of others. Therefore, noted Darwin, the fittest and most adaptable ones get to survive and continue their species as others become extinct.

According to Buddhist analysis, the lust for life (*kama*) involves our basal instincts, desires, cravings and longings that constantly are being triggered by what our eyes first see, then reinforced by what our ears hear, our nose smells, our tongue tastes and our hands touch or are touched by. It is only then that our desires and cravings arise to possess the object one sees and perceives to be desirable. Such desires can become impulsive, compulsive, and even obsessive. They also become thoughtless transgressions and mindless desecrations of things sacred and spiritual.

The basal craving to consume the life of things arises from the basic instinct to survive and exist. The compulsion to plunder arises from a "self working" with intentions to possess the object of one's desires for one's own self alone. So the karmic effects and affects that ensue from such

endeavors need to be understood in terms of a multi-dimensional context in which Buddhists see all things to be in an inseparable relationship between what are the "three worlds" of raw desire, pure shapes and forms, and abstract concepts and symbols.

Therefore, in Jodoshinshu faith, the most important thing is not what you believe, but what and how your innermost ongoing unseen thoughts, intentions and goals due to an "ego-self" are constantly contriving and conspiring to obtain instant sensual gratifications and personal satisfactions. Therefore, *shinjin*, what is "true and real faith," is not a matter of being simply "converted" from one set of beliefs and dogmas to another set of beliefs and dogmas. For in reality one's beliefs are convictions, mere abstractions. This is why you don't have to convert from one religion to another in order to begin living a life based on the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness in which all things and life are inseparable and in a sacred and spiritual relationship.

Now Sakyamuni Buddha's advice to the Kalamas tribe implies that "what the Buddha taught" is free of dogmatisms and sectarianism. For in the *Kalamas Sutta* the Buddha told the people: "Do not rely on mere belief and intellect." In another sutra, the Buddha when asked to answer certain questions such as "Which came first? The egg or the chicken?" he chose to remain silent. This has been called Sakyamuni's "Golden Silence."

There were other questions such as:

- What becomes of a Buddha after death?
- What is the first cause of the universe?
- Why are people born to then die?
- What sort of world is Nirvana?

If a person persisted in asking such unanswerable questions, he often answered with parables such as "if a man shot by a poisoned arrow refused to have it immediately extracted and the proper antidote applied, he would die even before he could find out who shot the arrow, which direction it came from, how long it was, whether the tip was made of flint, bone, metal and so on endlessly. The person would die before even the first question could be answered."

Buddhism isn't interested in wasting one's

precious unrepeatable moments of one's one and only life by asking such unanswerable questions.

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Donations

Buddha, instead, was interested in finding the proper medicine to counteract the three basic poisons of greed, hate and pride. He, for this reason, has been likened to a physician diagnosing a person's sickness then preparing and applying the proper medicine and/or treatment to cure the person of his physical ills and mental disorders.

According to Buddha, the cure for all mankind's sickness is to be found in the Four Noble Truths and by living the Noble Eightfold Path. According to Shinran Shonin, enlightenment and Buddhahood for a person of irreversible karmic desecrations and transgressions are found only by trusting and taking refuge in Amida Buddha's Sacred Name, that is to say *Namoh-amida-butso* in gratitude, humility and a penitence full of joy. Thus, *nenbutso* means contemplating and thinking of Amida Buddha's Selfless Wisdom and All-embracing Compassion wherein no sentient being is condemned and abandoned. So Shinran instead of beginning with the Right Knowing of Amida began first by trusting in Amida Buddha through Right Contemplation of Amida as the very manifestation of the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness. Then, through Right Reflection he found himself already grasped and embraced within Amida Buddha's Infinite Wisdom and Boundless Compassion because he was incapable of Rightly Speaking, Doing, Earning a Livelihood, and Persevering.

BUDDHIST STORIES AND PASSAGES

"There is no fire like lust, no grip like hate; there is no net like delusion; no river like craving."
Dhammapada v 151. Ven. Bikkhu Silacara. The Path of Buddhism.
p. 178.

QUESTION AND ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What do you mean by "Other Power is Amida Buddha"? Does it mean giving up one's will and self for the sake of others?

ANSWER: No, it does not mean to deny one's self in order to help others. For all life, including one's own, exists by benevolence of the Power of Another and all things living and non-living are in an

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inseparable relationship. What Other Power means is that all "living" and "non-living" things should be considered sacred. Practically speaking, this means we should not be wasteful or excessive with the things that sustain our lives. Ethically, this means all things, especially fellow human beings, should be treated with kindness and generosity, especially with reverence.

Spiritually, to trust in the Other Power means to take refuge in the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness, and thereby, live one's life in gratitude and a humility brimming over with a joyful penitence. This is why, I repeat, Shinran said even things like "... plants, trees and the land all attain Buddhahood." What this means is that all things, both living and non-living, are sacred and spiritual.

Each and every one of us are all on a spiritual journey being led by Amida toward higher states of consciousness, ultimately to that highest state called "Nirvana Without Residues" where all become One. The Pure Land therefore is another way of saying Nirvana, the ultimate state free of taints and blemishes of selfishness, resentments and vanities.