



# GASSHO

October

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*"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"*



## FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS AND EIGHTFOLD NOBLE PATH

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Once again, I would like to reflect on the Four Noble Truths. The first truth is that our world is "full of suffering" because it is riddled by falsehoods and lies. Acknowledging this fact ultimately leads one to Right Contemplate the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness that are timeless verities. This Truth of Selflessness and Realty of Togetherness then enables one to trust and take refuge in Amida Buddha's Primal Vow that is his Sacred Name: *Namoh-amida-butsu*. This Name appears in one's deepest consciousness as a "voiceless voice." It is an "inner voice" much like an unseen "electric current" that illuminates one's person with the currents of Immeasurable Wisdom and Immeasurable Compassion radiating throughout one's whole being and person.

This is how Shinran Shonin, in having Rightly Contemplated Amida Buddha (*nembutsu*), came to trust in the power of the Dharma's Selfless Wisdom upon taking refuge in its All-embracing Compassion wherein his karma riddled person was grasped never ever to be abandoned. In doing so, Shinran was "enabled" to Rightly Know and Rightly Understand why he, as the person of unreversible transgressions and desecrations as he was, had been grasped and embraced by Amida Buddha, never to be rejected. Then, through Right Reflection he realized he would never be let go until he came to attain buddhahood in the Pure Land, or *Nirvana Without Residues*. All this was entirely due to Amida's Benevolence and Compassion.

The term *nembutsu* translates as "thought of Buddha" or "to be thinking of Amida Buddha"

## MONTH'S THOUGHT



"When I began to study Zen, mountains were mountains; when I thought I understood Zen, mountains were not mountains; but when I came to full knowledge, mountains were again mountains." A Zen Master's words in D.T. Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism*. p. 288.



as the very manifestation of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness that are Immeasurable Light and Immeasurable Life unconditionally embracing all things and forms of life "just as they are without rejections or exclusions." To have been so illuminated by Wisdom and embraced by Compassion is to be awakened that one has never been or will ever be abandoned or rejected. Such a state of assurance is obtained by just reciting Amida's Sacred Name *Namoh-amida-butsu* in genuine trust and faith which is the most difficult of all difficult things to do for a person full of doubts and uncertainties.

This is why Shinran Shonin declared:

The attainment of buddhahood through the *nembutsu*, this is Shin-shu, the "True Teachings." This Teaching is ... the store of awakening ... the sudden teaching within the sudden teaching. Gutoku Shinran, *Nyushutsu nimon geju*, in *Shinran chosaku zenshu*, ed. by Kaneko Daiei Kyoto: Hozokan, 1964, 399-400.

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# REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SERVICES FOR OCTOBER 2014

### 1ST SUN Oct 5th:

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

### 2ND SUN Oct 12th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service  
Dharma Talk

### 3RD SUN Oct 19th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service  
Dharma Talk

### 4th SUN Oct 26th:

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

## 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*

Mr. Thomas Teramae 84 yrs. Aug. 6, 2014  
Mrs. Evelyn Okayama 94 yrs. Aug. 29, 2014  
Mrs. Tsuruyo Kamemoto 95 yrs. Sept. 8, 2014

## THANK YOU

*for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!*

**THANK YOU** for participating  
in the 2014 Chicken & Sushi!

### 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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# REV. SAKAMOTO'S CORNER

## Itadakimasu, the words which involve the gratitude

by Rev. Hidehito Sakamoto

Hello everyone! We are now in the tenth month of our centennial year. How are you doing?

This month, I would like to share an experience about 20 years ago. I was completing a correspondence course to get a teacher's license, and the only remaining task was to complete the training at a school. I applied to my alma mater and entered the training with much hope.

But upon starting my training, I was scolded by my mentor often, because I made many mistakes. It was the junior high school where I graduated, but it was completely different from the way it used to be.

When a teacher enters the classroom, he or she begins to check attendance. In my school days, the teacher called upon the names of the male students first, then continued to the female students. But nowadays, Japanese education is gender-free. So the roll book was written with male and female names mixed together and order from the letter A, I, U, E, O to the last letter WA.

This was my first mistake. Then the next class was physical education. I told the female students to go to the other classroom and change their clothes. But the mentor stopped me and said, "It is discrimination to make male and female students change clothes in different rooms. Have them change in the same room!" I was surprised, but I followed my mentor's instructions.

When the morning classes ended, we prepared for the school lunch. Just before we began to eat, I told to the students, "Please put your hands together and say *itadaki masu* together!"

This was the custom when I was a student. But here again, my mentor got upset and stopped me. She said, "It is prohibited to make students say *itadaki masu* before meals in Japanese school."

I was terribly shocked and researched it when I went home that day. It started from Toyama-prefecture. One housewife complained to the school, "Don't make my child say *itadaki masu* before school lunch! Don't make my child do such a religious-like thing at school! I pay the school lunch fee, so my child shouldn't have to say *itadaki masu*."

When I read the article, I felt what a silly mother she was. If we get rid of gratitude from this world, nothing else remains. Because everything is given to us. We cannot live without the support of many others. Meal time is an especially good occasion to remind ourselves of this truth. Before eating, we put our hands together and say *itadaki masu* as our humble expression of thanks for the food. We remind ourselves of the sacrifice made by the animals and plants. Everyone should feel this gratitude, no matter what religion.

I think that everyone does bad things, killing the living, usually without even thinking about it. We should show gratitude for the sacrifices made by putting our hands together and saying *itadaki masu* before eating.

Shinran Shonin's teachings are said to be the one in which helping a bad person is the goal of Amida Buddha. As Jodo Shinshu Buddhists, we combine *itadaki masu* with *Namo Amida Butsu*. "Namo" in *Namo Amida Butsu* can be understood as "I am deeply grateful for" and "Amida Butsu" is all the plants, animals, fowl, and fish that have been sacrificed for our food. So when we say the *Nembutsu* (*Namo Amida Butsu*) combined with the meaning of *itadaki masu*, we can be more aware of "oneness" with the world. Without everything in this world, I don't exist! Other living things' lives are sustaining my life. So we sentient beings should acknowledge with gratefulness such lives and say the *nembutsu* in gratitude.

Namo Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu,  
Namu Amida Butsu

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What Shinran means by these words is that when a person truly trusts in Amida and utters *Namoh-amida-butsu* (*nem/butsu*) in sincere deep faith, such a person, in that very instant, suddenly experiences a complete transformation of her or his ingratitude into gratitude, irreverence into humility and impertinence into penitence.

Such a "transformation" cannot be contrived or ritualized or effected through one's own efforts or religious endeavors. Such a "transformation" occurs only when one has truly trusted and taken complete refuge in Amida Buddha's Selfless Light of Wisdom and All-embracing Life of Compassion. Upon experiencing such an "awakening of true and real faith" Shinran came to confess: "... in this foolish being filled with blind passion, living in this impermanent world of burning house, all things are empty and vain; therefore, untrue. Only the nembutsu is true, real and sincere" (*T. Unno. Tannisho. Epilogue. p. 36*).

Most of us because of our thoughtlessness and mindlessness live in denial that "all things are impermanent" (*sarva dhamma annica*). In our thoughtlessness and insensitivities, we continue to live as though "there will always be a tomorrow." As of consequence, we ignore the fact that we are dying as we are living as well as living and dying in each moment of our lives that is passing us by as quickly as a "flash of lightning." As Rennyō Shōnin in his *Epistle on Whitish-grey of Bones and Ashes* (*Hakkotsu no Gobun Sho*) has said: "It is most urgent that we, without further delay, concern ourselves immediately with the 'grave matters of the after life' and devote ourselves to a life of uttering the nembutsu!"

Therefore, Shin Buddhists need to be aware of the Four Noble Truths. The First Truth is the undeniable fact that life is full of suffering. The Second Truth then is the actuality that to each difficulty, there are objective causes and subjective reasons. The Third Truth is the fact that unless the actual causes and real reasons for a difficulty are pinpointed, the proper method or solution for a given physical, mental, emotional or ethical problem cannot be formulated and applied to resolve the problem. The Fourth Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path, a comprehensive solution formulated by Sakyamuni Buddha to resolve man's mental-emotional, moral-ethical and spiritual-religious problems.

Paths three through six involve what are the minimal Five Precepts for Buddhist laity to uphold and live by. Precepts are not commandments of some omnipotent deity who, if disobeyed, brings not only his wrath but also his punishments, even death (see Exodus 21:17, 31:14; Lev. 24:16). Here, it is most important to make very clear that "precepts" are not "commandments," for precepts are governed by orderly and uniform laws of karma based on causality, conditionality, interdependency and inseparability. Karma, therefore, implies moral responsibility and ethical accountability for one's thoughts, motives, speech and actions.

Sakyamuni Buddha in clarifying the principle of karma put it this way:

"The evil done by oneself, self-begotten, self-nursed, crushes the foolish, even as a diamond grinds a hard gem." Irving Babbitt. *The Dhammapada. p. 26*.

"By oneself is evil done; by oneself one is defiled. Purity and impurity belong to oneself, no one can purify another." *Loc. cit. p. 27*.

Precepts involve not only one's choices and decisions, they also involve one's motives and intentions. So, it is clear, Buddhist precepts are not commandments of some omnipotent divinity that have to be upheld lest his wrath and punishments descend on those who disobey them.

Amida's Vows of Compassion, as of consequence, are referred to as "The Karmic Activities of His Great Vows" (*Dai Gan Gooriki*). So too, the mysterious benevolent workings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who keep appearing in the world of sentient beings to enlighten and return with them to their Pure Lands. They are all manifestations of *Nirvana Without Residues*. In other words, the Truth of the Dharma's Selflessness and its Togetherness applies to all non-living and living things since timeless, endless time that is without a beginning or an ending.

Therefore, as I often repeat, the Dharma is not the monopoly of any one man, race, ethnicity, culture, ideology, religion, specific geographical site or given specific historical era. For, the Dharma as Absolute Truth and Ultimate Reality is beyond all philosophical speculations and theological suppositions. This is why all religions are but "fingers

pointing to the moon" and are not the full moon in the night's darkness. Therefore, the Dharma is unfathomable and immeasurable as is the Great Unknown that is yet beyond the full moon and the total night's unfathomable darkness yet beyond the twinkling stars in the visible night's darkness.

To have taken refuge in such an inconceivable dimension of Selflessness and its Togetherness forever embracing and sustaining this world and all other worlds throughout the universe is to have been "awakened" by Amida Buddha's Forty-eight Vows of Compassion that were duly consummated for the sake of all sentient beings both "good" and "evil" without favoritisms or discriminations. For these reasons, that Amida's Selfless Light of Wisdom and her Life of All-embracing Compassion keep timelessly grasping sentient beings without favoritism is a great mystery (*fukashigi*), a reality that is beyond words and concepts (*fukasho*).

Therefore, Sakyamuni Buddha long ago pointed out the karmic principle that:

"If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon." Irving Babbitt. *The Dhammapada* I. p. 3.

Then, more importantly, he also pointed out that:

"If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him." *Ibid*.

These words of the Sakyamuni show that a person's life can either become "full of suffering" or "full of happiness" depending on what thoughts, sentiments and motivations he chooses and decides to hold in his heart that then become the very thoughts and feelings that trigger the things he says and does that are either helpful or hurtful.

Let us then briefly review Western history beginning with Columbus' early voyages to Hispaniola in 1492. For it is most important to note that even before his time, European traders, settlers and adventurers were already encountering Hinduism and Buddhism as well as Confucianism and Taoism. Christian missionaries because of their biblical perspectives were misconstruing such terms like *dukkha* as "life is suffering" instead of "life is full of suffering." As of consequence, they

## WORDS OF SHINRAN

" ... it is not necessary to put on any outward form of wisdom or morality or purity, though we are holding within ourselves all manners of falsehood and unreality; only let the Vows of Amida, the original abode (essence), work themselves out. O, be thou ever reverent! Never think that this is slighting the dignity of a god, and there will be no divine wrath visited you yourself." Quoted in Alfred Bloom's "The Story of Heitaro."

concluded that what the Buddha taught was nothing more than a doctrine of pessimism, nihilism and fatalism.

Commodore Matthew Perry opened Japan to the world on March 31, 1854. Then, during the Meiji Restoration Era (1868-1912) and Taisho Period (1912-1926), Japan, out of economic and political necessity, became an imperialistic nation embroiled, as already was the United States, in expansionism and nation building. The years between 1860 and WWI were times when the world's known oceans were primarily under the control of the Imperial British navy that was unchallenged. Today, the United States with its Navy, Army and Air Force dominates the regions and oceans of the world.

India was first colonized by the Portuguese in 1416. Then in 1757 the British defeated the Mughal Dynasty (1526-1707) and India came under their control. By 1607 English settlers were already occupying Maine. The territory was formally part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1652 and had been recognized by royal charter as part of Massachusetts in 1691. In 1820 Maine became a state. The region formally from "Maine" to the Mississippi was then still under British control until the thirteen American colonies declared their independence on July the 4th in 1776. Although China was never colonized, Hong Kong was ceded to the British after the First Opium War (1839-42).

During the Meiji Restoration and Taisho Period, Japan became a fully industrialized nation. It is to be noted that the Hawaiian Kingdom that was established between 1795 and 1810 was toppled in 1893. During this time, Japan, like

other European nations, was vying for pieces of the global pie in Far East Asia. In the process, she became exposed to the influences of classical European culture, its institutions, traditions and developing sciences and technologies. However, unlike other Asian nations, Japan was able to resist Christianity to retain her Shinto beliefs and ways of imported Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism.

Confucianism and Taoism were already part of Japanese national identity in sentiments of loyalty to the emperor as a divinity based on Shinto or the Way of the gods. After the atom bomb that ended WWII, Japan began recovering to become embroiled again in ways of global capitalism and multinational corporations. Its people joined the world of "consummate consumers" of endless material goods, devices and conveniences now even more on a massive scale that has become excessive and wasteful, resulting in much damage to living ecosystems through climatic changes resulting in rising temperatures and waters.

An important point to be noted concerning the early initial periods of Europeans exploring "new-found-lands" is the fact that they were intruders who appropriated native lands to displace, eliminate or subjugate the peoples as menials or slaves. They were accompanied by Catholic priests bent on "converting" pagans, heathens and idolators to Christianity as justified by certain Bible verses (see Psalms 2:8,9; Matt. 28:16-20). The first American missionary was sent to Burma in 1807. The 1800s is characterized by missionaries inspired by Jesus' mandate: "Go and make disciples of the nations!"

Therefore, even today fundamentalist and evangelical Christians continue to misconstrue what the Buddha taught. Walpola Rahula pointed out this proclivity as follows:

"The First Noble Truth ... is generally translated by almost all scholars as 'The Noble Truth of Suffering,' and it is interpreted to mean that life according to Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain. Both translation and interpretation are highly unsatisfactory and misleading. It is because of this limited, free and easy translation, and its superficial interpretation, that many people have been misled into regarding Buddhism as pessimistic." *What The Buddha Taught*. p. 16.

In specifically entitling his book *What The Buddha Taught* instead of just *Buddhism*, Walpola Rahula clearly was pointing out the fact that the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path are not "-isms" but truths based on causation, conditionality, interdependency, inseparability and karma.

Now, the Noble Eightfold Path, or the Fourth Noble Truth, entails the minimal Five Precepts for lay Buddhists to uphold. Buddhist precepts, as mentioned, are not to be confused with biblical commandments. For, they are not observed in fear of some deity's wrathful retributions and fiery damnations. They are based on the principles of causation and facts of karmic consequences. Buddhist precepts, for this reason, cannot be equated to the Ten Commandments of God, the breaking of which meant God's punishments and even death (see II Chronicles 15:12-13).

Now, the intriguing question arises as to why Christianity itself has not been rendered as an "-ism." For in the 17th century European scholars of religion were classifying the world's major religions into four basic categories, Judaism, Christianity, Islamism and Paganism. The first three imply that the Abrahamic religions are monotheistic and not pantheistic as are the religions of pagans or heathens. Pantheists or polytheists, therefore, are idolatrous. The category Paganism implies worship of "idols" and "graven images" that are abominations to the One and Only God called Jehovah in Judaism, God the Father in Christianity, or Allah in Islam.

As of consequence, in spite of Buddhism being a non-theistic religion, it was misperceived as a pagan and pantheistic religion because of its many images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as well as its incorporation of folk gods, goddesses and ancestral spirits. It was in this way that Buddhist images came to be seen by Catholics, Christians and Muslims as abominations in the sight of their one and only God which were to be eliminated if not destroyed (see Exodus 22:19; Quran 2:191-193). The reason also was because bowing or praying to "idols" or "graven images" was forbidden as stated in the first and second of God's commandments. In fact, in ancient Jewry, those who broke any of God's commandments were either stoned to death or incinerated (Numbers 32:15-18; Deuteronomy 4:24).

Therefore, present day Shin Buddhists need

to give some thought as to why worshipping images of Amida and the saying of *Namoh-amida-butsu* becomes a clear mirror on which one's karma riddled self becomes bared and naked for one's self reflections. For if one Rightly Reflects on one's inner nature it then becomes possible for him to Rightly Contemplate on why it is that Amida has, is and yet unflinchingly continues to keep grasping and embracing all sentient beings until the last one of them attains Perfect Peace and Happiness. One then realizes that one's self is especially the "evil person" who is the object of Amida's Compassion who has never been abandoned, which defies all common sense, logic and reason.

In fact, the first two of Amida's Fundamental Vows has Amida descending into the deepest of hells until the last one who has fallen therein is retrieved and brought to the safety of her Pure

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## Donations

*continued from p. 2*

### SHINRAN'S WASAN

Revere Amida Buddha as  
"Majestic Flaming Light,"  
For her Light so clear  
is most pure and bright!  
Her beaming Light disperses  
the very darknesses  
of the Three Realms,\*  
Take refuge, therefore,  
in this Great Being  
of Pure, Clear Light!

*Jodo Wasan No. 8*  
rkt – translation.

Land full of freedom and bliss. Such a thought also defies all human comprehension and understanding. However, it should be noted that Vows one and two indicate that Amida is not a deity who condemns sentient beings to some kind of eternal fire because of their failings and imperfections. Quite the contrary, Amida Buddha, instead, keeps entering therein until the last one of them has been retrieved, enlightened and transformed into a Buddha to become the equal of him.

It was through such an “awakening of faith” that Shinran Shonin was “enabled” to Rightly Know and Understand and thereby become fully awake to say:

“... I am absolutely incapable of any religious practice, hell is my only home.” Taitetsu Unno. Tannisho. Ch. II, p. 6.

This “realization” also made Shinran quite “aware” that he was incapable of Right Speaking, Doing, Earning a Livelihood, and Persevering in his revering of things sacred and spiritual.

This is how Shinran Shonin came to realize that it is:

“When the thought of saying the nembutsu emerges decisively from within, having entrusted ourselves to the inconceivable power of Amida’s vow which saves us, enabling us to be born in the Pure Land, in that very moment we receive the ultimate benefit of being grasped never to be abandoned.” *Loc. cit.*, Ch. I, p. 5.

Let us then continue to ponder, reflect, contemplate and meditate deeply on the significance of these words of Shinran. For, in doing so, we are “enabled” to turn our upside-down thoughts, words and actions right side up so that we can live our lives in helpful and healing ways instead of harmful and hurtful ways. Namoh-amida-butsu.

## **BUDDHIST STORY OR PASSAGE**

*Namu-amida-butsu*  
Is like the moon, like the sun;

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It is like the rising sun:  
My mind grows warm,  
So does my body.  
Let me take a rest  
For a while here.  
How delightful this!  
*Namu-amida-butsu!*  
*Namu-amida-butsu!*  
Myokonin Saichi.

## **QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER**

Question: What is the Infinite Wisdom?

Answer: As a reply, I quote the words of Shinran: “appearing in the form of light called ‘Tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters’ ... dispelling the darkness of ignorance and unobstructed by karmic evil.... Unhindered means that it is not obstructed by the karmic evil and blind passion of being. Know, therefore, that Amida Buddha is light, and that light is the form taken by wisdom.” SBT-Series. *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*. pp. 43-44.