

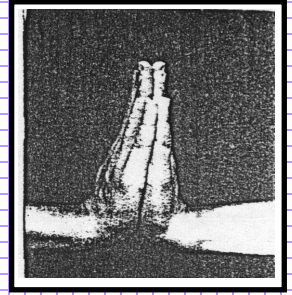
GASSHO

February

2015

Issue No: 02-15

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



LIKE FLASHES OF LIGHTNING ONE'S LIFE KEEPS PASSING BY!

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Rennyō Shōnin in his "Epistle on Lightning and Morning Dew" brushed the following words in calligraphic ink:

"... the pleasures of human life last only as long as a flash of lightning or the morning dew, a dream or an illusion. Even if we enjoy a life of pomp and do as we wish, this is only a matter of some fifty to a hundred years. ..." Minor L. and Ann T. Rogers. *RENNYO*. p 161.

Then he continued to brush the following:

"If the wind of impermanence were to come even now and summon us, would we not suffer illness of one kind or another and die? And indeed, at the time of death, no part of either the family or wealth on which we have depended for so long can accompany us. Thus all alone, we must cross that great river of three currents, at the end of the mountain path that we take after death. ..." *Ibid.* (The "three currents": a shallow river whose currents are easy to cross, a river with a bridge of gold and silver to cross over its swirling currents, and a cascading river with inundating waves with deep under-towing currents full of unbearable torment.)

In past issues of *GASSHO* I quoted and translated words from a song *Haha wo Shinobu* (In Fondly Remembering Mom). A male voice introduces the song with the words: "Human beings are born into this world completely naked

MONTH'S THOUGHT



Anyone who has lost something they thought was theirs forever finally comes to realize that nothing really belongs to them. — Paulo Coelho



without a thing or a name. Then, once again they leave this world completely naked without a thing to their name as they step into the Great Unknown Beyond."

When Sakyamuni Buddha passed into *Nirvana Without Residues*, he was eighty years old. When Shinran Shōnin passed away he was ninety years old. My dad was eighty years old when he died. My mom was eighty-three when she suddenly passed away. So, in the years I was approaching the age of eighty, all the more did the words of Rennyō Shōnin's "Epistle on White Ashes" (*Hak'kotsu no Go-bun' Sho*) emerge in my deepest consciousness.

Here are some of his words:

"our lives are but brief fleeting moments. ... Where is that person who has lived even for a mere hundred years in perfect health and happiness? ... Whether one goes before others or others before one does, who is there that knows the exact moment of his final breath of life? ... When the winds of impermanence descend upon us, our eyes must close for

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR FEBRUARY 2015

1st SUN Feb 1st

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

2nd SUN FEB 8th

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

3rd SUN FEB 15th

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

10:30 A.M.

General Membership Meeting & New Year's Party

4th SUN FEB 22nd

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.
Int'l Karate League – Walter Nishioka

KARATE CLASSES Thurs 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Hawaii Shotokan Karate – Alan Sekiguchi

FUJINKAI LADIES' FELLOWSHIP GROUP
Tues 9 a.m. – noon

With Deepest Sympathy

Mr. Herbert Mikami Sept 30, 2014

Mrs. Violet Hirata 98 yrs. Dec 18, 2014

THANK YOU

for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

2015 Memorial Service Schedule

2014	1 Year	2013	3 Year	2009	7 Year
2003	13 Year	1999	17 Year	1991	25 Year
1983	33 Year	1966	50 Year	1914	100 Year

continued on p. 5

forever never to see the following morning's dawning light. ... In realizing how fleeting and fragile one's life actually is, regardless of whether one be bent by aging or brimming over with youthful exuberance, without further delay, one should take refuge in Amida Buddha by uttering his Sacred Name in trust and gratitude." *rkt translation.*

These words were written not to depress or make us fearful of death. They were written to awaken one's gratitude and indebtedness to Amida Buddha for his Wisdom that has never nor will ever fail us as it is constantly being manifest through his Compassion that has never or will ever abandon a person riddled by transgressions and desecrations until he finally attains perfect enlightenment and ultimate Buddhahood.

For this reason, Shinran Shonin urged us to express gratitude as follows:

"Concerning our indebtedness
to Amida's Great Compassion
and benevolence for us,
We should express gratitude
though our bodies in doing so
be ground into dust!
Concerning our indebtedness as well
to the Great Teachers of Wisdom
we should express thankfulness
though our bones, in doing so,
be crushed and shattered!

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 59
rkt trans.

According to Shinran Shonin, in such expressions of genuine gratitude and indebtedness, there

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

"... 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."

Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho. Epilogue.* p 18.

are no traces of one's calculating, contriving or attempts to negotiate with Amida for one's "awakening of faith" or attainment of Buddhahood based on one's good works and the virtues and merits of one's moral accomplishments! For the conditions of enlightenment and basis for Buddhahood are unconditional gifts of Amida Buddha's Infinite Wisdom and Immeasurable Compassion that have and continue to embrace equally both the "good person" and most especially the "evil person." All we need to do is to trust and take refuge in Amida's Powers and Virtues. The reason being that all human efforts are tainted by egoism, therefore, flawed and tainted.

So once again let us listen to the words of Rev. Yoshitaka Tamai. He was born on Oct. 10, 1900, and died on Sept 5, 1983. Rev. Tamai devoted 53 of his 83 years of life to the spiritual, cultural and social needs of *Issei* and *Nisei* Buddhists. His ministry began in 1930 when he arrived in Denver during the Depression years before WWII. He traveled long distances to *Issei* homes in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Montana, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico. Because his life was characterized by kindness and compassion, he came to be known as the "Shinran Shonin of Denver." Not only was he an eminent priest but a human being full of gentleness, kindness and generosity.

When Rev. Shodo Tsunoda and his wife were released from Poston Relocation Camp in August of 1944, they joined Rev. Tamai and lived as a family. For the Tsunodas had adopted the niece of Rev. Tamai. In the introduction to Rev. Tamai's *Ichinyo* which Rev. Tsunoda trans-

lated into English, he relates of the times when the temple was unable to pay Rev. Tamai's salary because the *Issei* themselves were suffering the hardships of the Great Depression. Many people were looking for food in garbage bins. In the farming areas the houses were still being lit with kerosene lamps. Stoves were fed with logs that had been cut beforehand from dead trees. Of course, there weren't washing machines, dryers and refrigerators, much less cell phones, personal computers or color television. The labor on the farms was done by hand and by horses. Rev. Tamai nevertheless endured and persevered. Rev. Tsunoda in working with Tamai sensei said: "there was never a moment that I did not consider him to be anything other than a *bodhisattva*."

Rev. Tamai's recollections of those years of economic hard times and racial discrimination brought to memory the times of early plantation days in Hawaii after annexation and especially as a territory of the United States between 1930 to 1941. Rev. Tamai also recalled that upon his arrival in 1930, he was told by the then president of the fledgling Denver Church, Tohachi Uyehara, as follows:

"Thank you for coming to be our minister. You should know, however, that since the United States is a Christian country, all Americans are influenced by Christian teachings from the time they are in kindergarten. Since the entire American society is Christian, no amount of diligence on your part in spreading the *dharma* is going to make much of a dent. We *Issei* (first-generation Japanese) will support our temple vigorously as long as we live, but when the *Nisei* (second-generation Japanese) come of age, Buddha-dharma will pass away with us ... so don't worry too much about trying to spread the dharma...." Yoshitaka Tamai. *Ichinyo*. p. 1.

Lately, Shin Buddhism's future has also been characterized by present day researchers and academics to be bleak. It seems that the bleak future of Shin Buddhism brought over by the *Issei* has been encapsulated in these words of

Mr. Uyehara to Rev. Tamai.

Today, the future of Shin Buddhism has been characterized by the researchers and scholars who see Japanese-American Shin Buddhists as descendants of *Issei* immigrants who not only continue to ethnically enclave themselves, but also to hold on to their religion in terms of Japanese customs and identity. It must be remembered, however, that the initial waves of *Issei* were aliens brought in as contract laborers. They had no right to vote or to own property. Many did not speak English and were often at a disadvantage in the court systems. They were socially looked down upon as idol worshippers. As Asians, they were racially characterized as the "Yellow Peril."

To this day, Shin Buddhist temples in Hawaii are characterized as a religion based on funerals, memorials and Japanese festive celebrations. This is why researchers find that Caucasians (*haoles*) find Shin Buddhists in Hawaii to be too Japanese. This is why "haoles" gravitate to Zen, Tibetan and Theravadan forms of monastic Buddhism. These forms of Buddhism were introduced much later to the U.S. than Shin Buddhism. White Americans are attracted to forms of Buddhism that espouse self-discipline and religious practices believed to enhance their personal physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development. Most young Americans, therefore, dislike being affiliated with any established religious institution. Thus, Zen meditation practices focused on "finding one's true self" are of personal interest to them.

So Rev Tamai especially noted the following even about the Japanese in Japan after WWII:

"There has been wholesale and uncritical acceptance of Western culture by Japan in the recent past. For that reason, Buddhist thought was considered 'old,' and thrown out without further consideration. This is in complete contrast with the United States where many, particularly the young, eagerly seek to discover the Buddhist insight into life and living." p 3.

For this reason, he said: I believe Buddha-dharma is what will set American democracy right, and save us from the dangers of our age.

But then he also saw a problem in the attitude of American youth in general.

"There is not the slightest feeling of *mottai-nai* about receiving money for doing nothing. *Mottai-nai* ... at its base is a feeling of humility and gratitude towards all things." *Ibid.*

He firmly believed that:

"... if the thought of *ichinyo* (oneness), indebtedness to others, and the great goal of nirvana enter the thought of democracy, that the United States will truly become a nation that can lead the peoples of the world. ..." pp 3, 4.

This is why he said:

"... I firmly believe the great mission that we Buddhists in the United States have is to bring this realization in the peoples of the United States." *Ibid.*

Let us then, as Shin Buddhists, listen to what Rev. Tamai had to say about the *Nisei* and *Sansei* of his day who were being Westernized into what I call the "consummate American consumer!"

One of Tamai sensei's admonitions after WWII to us as Japanese Americans was:

"We must not divide everything into two groups from the beginning. We must not love our 'enemy' after first dividing everyone into friends and enemies. *Ichinyo* looks at everyone the same. Unless this viewpoint becomes the way everyone looks at everyone else, we will always be unhappy." p 5.

Then, noting the world situation, he said:

"Actually, the natures of both democratic capitalism and communism are the

SHINRAN'S WASAN

Falsehoods by sentient beings
spread and rage everywhere!
They're like a dense jungle
full of thorny prickly thickets.
Nembutsu followers are disparaged.
Bitterness and violence prevails,
spilling everywhere!

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 9
rkt translation

same. Both strengthen our ego. Both are social systems that place our ego at the center, and that is why they are so frightening. That is why we must be educated in the doctrine of 'non-ego' (*muga*) which is the basis of *ichinyo*." *Ibid.*

continues on p. 6

Donations

continued from p. 2

SACRED BUDDHIST PASSAGES

*As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp,
A mock show, dew drops, or a bubble,
A dream, a lightning flash, or cloud,
So should one view what is conditioned.*

*Diamond Sutra. Edward Conze,
trans.*

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It is hoped that you will take quality spiritual time in your reflections by contemplating and absorbing the truth of these words of Rev. Tamai in your "day to day life."

Then, Rev. Tamai surprisingly noted:

"Some may argue that democratic capitalism and communism are polar opposites, that they are enemies and not at all like each other. But they are the same." *Ichinyo*. p 5.

For, said Rev. Tamai:

"A life worth living is not a life of 'self-benefit and satisfying egoistic desires,' but rather 'awareness of our indebtedness and gratitude to Amida Buddha.'"

This is why we must reflect on and contemplate on these times characterized as "Decadent Dharma" (*Mappo*), times of endless wars, violence, cruelty and inhumanity that have taken on multi-national and global proportions where the minority few in positions of power and control get richer while the mass of ordinary citizens get poorer.

To be continued in the next Gassho



Reminder

General Membership Meeting and
New Year's Party - **February 15!**

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: You have been distinguishing between a person who has been "converted" from one who has undergone a "transformation."

ANSWER: I quote Shinran in reply as follows: "To be transformed means that evil karma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into the highest good, just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water. We are made to acquire the Tathagata's virtues through entrusting ourselves to this Vow-power; hence the expression, 'made to become so.'" SBT-Series. *Essentials of Faith Alone*. p 32.

In this metaphor of river waters becoming ocean waters, the point is that the waters of a river in becoming ocean waters are not being destroyed. This is the significance of what it means to be "transformed by true and real faith." River water in becoming ocean water does not become gasoline or crude oil.