



GASSHO

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“Hands together in reverence & gratitude”



THE EVILS OF OUR INDIVIDUALISTIC SOCIETY

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

As O’Bon season has begun in our Eight-island 50th State, the question arises, “Are local Japanese-American Buddhists observing O’Bon in the true spirit of Buddhism?” For it is the Bon dancing that attracts non-Buddhists, more so than a temple’s members themselves. Local born third- and fourth-generation Buddhists seem to be far removed from the faith of their deceased *Issei* ancestors.

To understand the Shin Buddhist view of O’Bon, it is important to have a clear understanding as to why Shinran Shonin uttered the following words which appear to be disrespectful.

“I, Shinran, have never even once uttered the *nembutsu* for the sake of my father and mother. ...” T. Unno. *Tannisho*. V. p. 10.

The profound significance of these words becomes clear by what Shinran subsequently uttered to clarify as to why he uttered these words as follows:

“The reason is that all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death. ...” *Ibid*.

Upon meditating on the profound significance of these words, one becomes “awake” and “realizes” why utterances of *Namoh-amida-butsu* are not prayers for only one’s self or

MONTH’S THOUGHT



A life worth living is not a life of “self-benefit and satisfying egoistic desires,” but rather “awareness of our indebtedness and gratitude for it.” —Yoshitaka Tamai, *Ichinyo*. p. 39.



only for one’s loved ones or just for one’s grand and great-grandparents.

Furthermore, Shinran said that if the uttering or invoking of *Namoh-amida-butsu* :

“were a good accomplished by my own powers, then I could transfer the accumulated merits of *nembutsu* to save my father and mother. But since this is not the case, when we become free from self-power and quickly attain the enlightenment of the Pure Land, we will save those bound closest to us through transcendental powers, no matter how deeply they are immersed in karmic suffering of the six realms of existence and the four modes of birth.” *Ibid*.

These words of Shinran inform us that the world of sentient beings and the boundless realms of Buddhas are inseparable and seamless from the Dharma’s Selflessness and Togetherness. This is what is meant by “two and yet one” as well as “one and yet two,” meaning “non-duality” (*fu-ni*). What these phrases mean is that until all beings are happy,

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR JUNE 2015

1st SUN June 7th

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

2nd SUN June 14th

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

3rd SUN June 21th

Father's Day
9 A.M. Eng. Service
Dharma Talk for Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

4th SUN June 28th

O'Bon Service
9 a.m. English Service
Guest speaker:
Rev. Ryoso Toshima

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

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

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safe and at peace, one's self as an individual cannot be truly happy, safe and at perfect peace. This fundamental truth is manifest by and through Amida's Sacred Name, Namoh-amida-butsu!

Even in the plantation days of our *Issei* immigrant parents, much of O'Bon observances were social-cultural events rather than times for inner reflection and meditation. Today, Bon dancing in Hawaii has all the more become a social event rather than a time for contemplating the number of one's ancestral parents over "seven generations" as recommended by the Buddha in the Ullambana Sutta.

I was surprised to learn that the Valley of the Temples, a mortuary and cemetery on the Windward side of Oahu, has been sponsoring annual Bon dances on the parking lot at its Byodo-in Temple site. Byodo-in Temple itself is a commercial enterprise and Byodo-in Temple has become a tourist destination. You are required to pay an entrance fee to tour its temple grounds.

According to Rev. Yoshitaka Tamai, Rennyō Shōnin said:

"Rejoice in your indebtedness to the Buddha regardless of your circumstances. Never forget that the conditions for your birth in the Pure Land have already been created." *Ichinyō*. p. 44.

The reason is because the Light and Life of Amida Buddha:

"is said to be 'unhindered in the ten directions.' This means that regardless

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

The Tathagata has fulfilled the Vows, which are the cause of Buddhahood, and thus called "Tathagata of the fulfilled body." This is none other than Amida Tathagata. ... Thus appearing in the form of light called "Tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters," it is without color and without form, ... dispelling the darkness of ignorance and unobstructed by karmic evil. ... For this reason, it is called "unhindered light." ... it is not obstructed by the karmic evil and blind passion of beings. Know, therefore, Amida Buddha is light and that light is the form taken by wisdom." *SBT-Series. Notes on "Essentials of Faith."* pp. 43, 44.

of how high a mountain we climb, how deep into the ocean we plunge, or how far out into space we go, there is no place in this universe where the Buddha's Great Compassion does not reach. **When we look up to His light of compassion simply and without pretension, we are blessed with joy naturally, without effort on our part.** If we experience this joy just once, we will be able to live a beautiful life...." *Loc. cit.*, pp. 45, 46. Words in bold characterize Shin Buddhist faith.

Just what then is such a life of joy?

To have trusted and taken refuge in the powers and virtues of Amida's Sacred Name can be likened to a person who has boarded a jet plane that is taking him to his destination called enlightenment and Buddhahood! Regardless of whether one is in the executive class or way back in economy class, all on board are being taken to a final destination called the Pure Land or Nirvana without blemishes and obstructions. A person who has trusted and taken refuge in Amida's Powers of Selfless Wisdom and Virtues of All embracing Compassion is like a person safely on board a

jet plane taking him to the destination called Nirvana Without Residues (*Mui-Nehan*). His arrival is assured and certain. Upon arrival he attains enlightenment and ultimate Buddhahood.

Such a person's utterances of *Namoh-amida-butsu* naturally trigger gratitude, humility, and especially feelings of *mottai-nai* and *ariga-tai*. *Mottai-nai* is a feeling of being undeserving and unworthy of whatever one has been given. *Ariga-tai* is a feeling of inexpressible gratitude that fills one's whole being with pure joy and happiness.

Tamai sensei also explained *mottai-nai* as expressive of one's remorse, especially a sorrow that one's very existence and survival necessitate the taking of countless things and lives of creatures. For these and other reasons a person of "true and real faith" is even more sorely aware of his thoughtless excessiveness and wastefulness with the very things and lives of creatures being taken and slaughtered in order to support and sustain his life. Today, we now realize that cutting down trees, clearing large tracts of virgin land, mining and drilling have and continue to compromise the very air we breathe, the water we drink and all that are in the ocean.

Tamai sensei then defined *ai-suma-nai*, a synonym for *mottai-nai*, as follows:

"*Ai-suma-nai* literally means 'it will not pass,' or perhaps in more understandable English, 'it cannot be excused.' It comes from a feeling that takes complete responsibility for all that happens, even though we may not have had anything directly to do with it. In a larger sense, it is awareness of the interrelationship of all things, and that therefore, everything that happens is our responsibility." *Loc. cit.* p. 55.

Tamai-sensei then asked, "How can a heart full of self-pride know anything about indebtedness to one's parents? [*Oya no on*]. How much less can such a heart know about the 'sacredness of things' and our 'duty to society?'" (p. 51. [] mine.)

Shinran Shonin's teachings lead us to reflect on our thoughtless transgressions and mindless desecrations. By doing so all our shortcomings and failings will be grasped and transformed by power of Amida's Wisdom Light and its virtues of Compassionate Life. In embracing the "good person" Amida especially more so embraces the "evil persons" by grasping to never reject or abandon him!

As Tamai sensei admonishes, let us consider the fact that:

"'Obstruction' is introduced when the idea of a 'self' or 'Ego' comes into our mind and heart. This is the fundamental problem in human life." (p. 41.)

These words of Tamai sensei point out that suffering occurs because of the notion that there is a "self" (*atman*) or an "ego" (a "me" or an "I") that is imagined to be in control of things when it's actually the other way around. The reality is that we as mortal beings are riddled by sensuality and subjectivities that imprison our minds with illusions and our hearts with delusions. "This is the fundamental problem in human life" (*ibid.*).

This is why, said Tamai sensei, we:

"don't say anything when things go well, but if the least thing goes wrong, we grumble and complain. The peace of the family is broken, and arguments break out between husband and wife, parents and children." p. 52.

As of consequence,

"We will never be happy if we consider the fortunate circumstance to be our right, and take it for granted. There is no value in suffering without reflecting on that suffering. Those who have never experienced suffering will never appreciate the deeper significance of the meaning of life." p. 42.

For this reason, said Tamai sensei, "We should also realize that although we do not always get

what we want, we always get everything we need" (p. 53).

A genuine sense of un-deservingness and unworthiness as a beneficiary of life's blessings instills feelings of pure gratitude in a person. Tamai sensei explained such feelings or intuitions as follow:

"Appreciation is the mind or heart that keenly understands how unworthy it is [how undeserving one is] to have the things it has. It is the mind that understands the value of all things in this world, the love and charity of people, and that has a deep feeling for them. It is the heart that understands that everything it has is due to the help of others. Those with such a mind and heart cannot help but place their hands together in gassho and quietly bow their heads in worship." p. 42. [] mine.

Therefore, said he,

"grumbling and expressing feelings of displeasure are a sure sign that we have not suffered enough. ..." p. 42.

As long as one is lacking in gratitude and appreciation, then discontent and dissatisfaction keep undermining all the good one has done and hopes yet to do.

As long as this attitude of ingratitude persists in the hearts of humankind, Tamai-sensei said,

"Misfortune will never be transformed into fortune" *Ibid.*

An "inner transformation" will not occur for as long as:

"we harbor feelings of hostility and antagonism towards others, we will never be able to get along peacefully with them. Even living things that we consider not to have a heart such as

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SHINRAN'S WASAN

From the other "nine directions"
Bodhisattvas keep visiting Him.
So too did Sakya the Sage,
did visit Him as a Tathagata
To laud Amida's virtues in a gatha.

Jodo Wasan No. 33
rkt translation

Donations

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SACRED BUDDHIST PASSAGES

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nani-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself, "It is over full. No more will go in." "Like this cup," said Nan-in, "you are full of your opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

—*anecdote told by Nyozen Sensaki.*

birds and fish, will not approach those with hostility in their hearts. The animosity that we harbor in our heart will be sensed by others regardless of how we try to hide it from them." (p. 41)

In these words of Tamai sensei are found the underlying reasons as to why human beings, societies, governments and nations to this very day are unable to follow a life based on "non-violence" (*ahimsa*) as especially expressed in the Dharmic religions of the East.

So, as the O'Bon season in Hawaii has begun once again, let us heed Tamai sensei's words asking us to "... reflect quietly ..." first by seeing deeply into our own person, especially into our subconscious self. For it is only then that one begins to see and face the hidden contradictions and paradoxes buried deep in one's consciousness. For O'bon times are spiritual times to quietly probe deeply into our deepest core being wherein one's ego is constantly undermining family, society and nature's living ecosystems. All things living and non-living are sacred and spiritual means that every thing is in a seamless, inseparable relationship of "many and yet one" as well as "one and yet many!" Indeed, all things and forms of life are seamless and inseparable!

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QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: Why is saying the nembutsu not a prayer?

ANSWER: *Namoh-amida-butsu* can only be but one's acknowledgement of one's indebtedness to Amida Buddha's Pure Light of Wisdom and Unfailing Compassion that has and keeps embracing one's self riddled by karma "just as it is" without condemnations and rejections. This is why uttering nembutsu is expression of one's pure gratitude and not one's asking some omnipotent deity for a miraculous intervention or a magical blessing. Utterances of genuine *Namoh-amida-butsu* are but a person's spontaneous expressions of indebtedness to Amida for having one's ingratitude and impertinence "transformed" into one's gratitude and penitence. This is much like the "bitterness" in persimmons being turned into their very "sweetness" by power of sunlight and virtue of moonlight.