

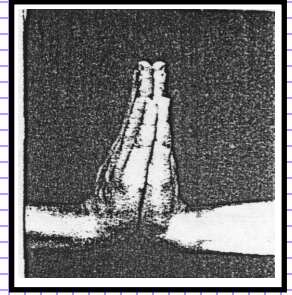
GASSHO

November

2015

Issue No: 11-15

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



INGRATITUDE OR GRATITUDE? IMPERTINENCE OR PENITENCE?

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Once again Thanksgiving Day will be observed on the 26th of this month which is a Thursday. I would like to continue reflecting on Reverend Yoshitaka Tamai's comments in last month's Gassho. Soon after WWII in the 1950's he said:

"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.'" *Ichinyo*. p. 39.

Then he explained indebtedness (*on*) and gratitude (*kansha*) as follows:

"Appreciation is the mind or heart that keenly understands how unworthy it is to have the things it has. It is the mind that understands the value of all things in the 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 to quietly place their hands together in gassho and quietly bow their heads in worship." Tamai, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

Shinran Shonin explained such an appreciation awakens a profound indebtedness for Amida's Timeless Benevolence and Unfailing Beneficence that words cannot explain. Such an awakening humbles a person of genuine faith naturally to lower and bow his head in reverence, especially in penitence brimming

MONTH'S THOUGHT



"Truly know that this self is a foolish being of karmic evil, repeating birth-and-death since beginning-less aeons ago, forever drowning and wandering without ever knowing the path of liberation."

Shan-tao's maxim



over with pure joy and bliss. The hands of such a person naturally come together right above his heart in indebtedness for Amida Buddha's benevolent Light of Selflessness and Life of All-embracing Togetherness in which no thing or life form has ever been excluded or rejected.

In his day, Tamai-sensei noted that most Americans were "unaware of their indebtedness to all things and do not have the mind of appreciation" (p. 13). They have, he said, no sense of how "undeserving" they are of life's many blessings that they have come to take for granted. For example, people when savoring the aroma of meat being barbecued over a grill are not aware of how the lives of countless innocent creatures had to be slaughtered so they could have meat foods on the table. There is no feeling of remorse or regret or sense of loss for the countless creatures that we've slaughtered.

Let us then reflect on what Sakyamuni Buddha said are the consequences as follows:

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR NOVEMBER 2015

1st SUN Nov 1st

(Services cancelled)

FUJINKAI MINI-BAZAAR

9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

2ND SUN Nov 8th

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

3RD SUN Nov 15th

ANNUAL **SAMGHA MEMORIAL SERVICE**

9 A.M. English Service
Guest Speaker:
Rev. Ryoso Toshima

4TH SUN Nov 22nd

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

5TH SUN Nov 29th

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.
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

Have a serger to donate?

Our sewing group would
most appreciate it!

**SHINSHU KYOKAI MISSION
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE FOLLOWING 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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"If a man offends a harmless, pure, and innocent person, the evil falls back upon him, like dust thrown up against the wind." Dhammapada 6, Praises of Buddha.

"A man is not noble in that he works harm to living creatures. Whoso is harmless towards all living things — he is to be called noble." Dhammapada 7, Praises of Buddha.

"He who hurts a creature which seeks for happiness will not find it for himself. All fear punishment. To all men life is dear. Judging others by yourself, slay not, neither causes to slay.

"He who hurts a creature which seeks for happiness will not find it for himself." Dhammapada 8, Praises of Buddha.

Tamai sensei, therefore, said:

"Modern man places too much emphasis on his rights. On the other hand, we place very little emphasis on our duties and responsibilities." p. 46.

He also noted that:

"Although we do as little work as possible, we still try to get as much as we can for that little effort. ..." *Ibid.*

Then he asked:

"Have you even once placed the hands of your heart together in gassho, and worshipped anyone?" p. 40.

Then Rev. Tamai noticed:

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

"When I ponder on the compassionate vow of Amida, established through five kalpas of profound thought, it was for myself, Shinran, alone. Because I am a being burdened so heavily with karma, I feel even more deeply grateful to the Primal Vow which is decisively made to save me." Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. Epilogue, p. 35.

"There are many unemployed persons in my city of Denver, but very few who will work industriously when given a job. They accept a job because they must have money to get along in this world, but they try to get the most money while doing the least amount of work for it. I believe this attitude will destroy the United States." p. 3.

Rev. Tamai believed that the lack of thankfulness and taking things for granted in Americans "will destroy the United States." That our country has and continues to operate on an ever increasing deficit seems to make these words of Tamai prophetic. When we review just the last three hundred and thirty years or so of America's past, despite its material abundance, we see a progression of much stress, divisiveness and violence. Although there is enough to meet everyone's needs and desires, there seems yet seems to be paucity in one's sense of self responsibility and accountability to others, especially to the living environment.

This is why said Tamai, "gratitude is what Buddha-dharma has to teach the people of the United States" (*ibid.*). Let us then once again look into what a life of gratitude and indebtedness is all about. Here are some expressions of gratitude I heard from the lips of *Issei* members of our temple during the Great Depression before WWII broke out. Many being from Hiroshima uttered the following in the Hiroshima dialect as follows:

Mot'tai nai noh! mot'tai nai noh! ...

Mono wa iki-teru ken' noh! ...
Mono wa somatsu ni shi-chyaa ikan' de!
... Mono wo ikasa nya noh! ...

For today's non-Japanese-speaking *Sansei* and *Yonse* these expressions have no meaning.

First of all, it is most difficult to render subtle meanings of Japanese *kanji* that are Chinese characters into exact English equivalents. Furthermore, English tends toward concrete, transactional and pragmatic values rather than the subtle nuances and feelings in Japanese expressions that escape one's sense perceptions tainted by one's likes and dislikes. Japanese *kanji* are actually Chinese pictographs and ideograms full of subtle intuitional meanings. They are not like the letters of an alphabet that are mere sounds (phonemes). They are pictographs of actual things and ideograms with specific images, meanings, symbolisms and nuances.

A case in point is the ideogram *kū* which in Buddhism stands for the "boundlessness" and "spaciousness" of the skies that are without blemishes or impediments. Such spaciousness though unseen is very much a reality. Nirvana has been likened to the open skies without blemishes or impediments. To translate the ideogram *kū* as "emptiness," as meaning "nothing exists" is to mistranslate as well as to misconstrue its meanings and actuality!

Shinran Shonin correctly referred to *kū* to be a state of "unobstructed freedom" free of ego blemishes and obstructions which in Buddhism is to become like the very spaciousness of the skies. This state free of blemishes and obstructions is extended to mean also the vast spaciousness of the entire cosmos itself which endlessly and boundlessly is of the infinite universe itself. Such a spaciousness is "Nirvana Without Blemishes and Obstructions."

Such then is the meaning of "spaciousness" applied to describe the Dharma World of Selflessness and Togetherness which contains all things and life forms just as they actually are. Such a realization of life's all-embracing-ness awakens feelings of *mot'tai nai*

in which one realizes how undeserving one is to be a beneficiary of such profound dimensions of things visible and not visible. Such Buddhist feelings and intuitions as depicted in Chinese pictographs and ideograms when translated into English inadvertently take on Judeo-Christian nuances of heaven and hell, saint and sinner, salvation and savior and so on that do not convey the dimensions of spaciousness (*kū* or *sunya*) in which all opposites are contained in a seamless, inseparable reality of Oneness (or Selflessness and Togetherness).

This is why, in a person who has undergone an "awakening of true and real faith," feelings of heartfelt regret and remorse also emerge in his deepest conscience concerning the things, creatures and animals constantly being taken so that human beings can live on and continue their own kind. So, paradoxically, this is why a person of "genuine faith" experiences feelings of deep regret, remorse and sadness concerning the loss of innocent things and lives.

To experience such genuine sympathy and commiseration it is necessary for a human being to have trusted in the powers of Amida's Wisdom and to have taken refuge in his virtues of Compassion. Undergoing such an "awakening of faith" enables a person to experience sorrow, remorse and regret for the myriad of things and forms of life that are being taken to provide the basic necessities, well being and survival of human beings. Surely, such a "realization" does not emerge out of assumptions that one is entitled and has the perfect right to the very things of life.

Once again, I quote one of Misuzu Kaneko's poems for children that conveys such feelings of gratitude and penitence. Kaneko-san must have herself undergone an "awakening of true and real faith" (*shinjin*) to have written such a poem. The poem is entitled "Fish."

"How sorry

I am for fish in the sea.
Rice is cultivated by people,
Cattle are raised in the pasture,
And even carp are fed in their ponds.

“Even though they don’t do
Anything bad,
They are eaten by people like me.
“How truly sorry I am
For fish in the sea.

Daishu Ueyama. *Misuzu’s World
of the Nembutsu*. 28.

This poem gives us a peek into what the world
of *O-nembutsu* is all about.

One side to the coin of true and real
faith is one’s gratitude full of joy and gladness
while the other side is full of one’s lament and
penitence, remorse and regret. Both are sides
of a faith that is true and real, one side one’s
self of transgressions, the other side Amida
embracing him never to reject or abandon him.

Amida Buddha’s Wisdom and Compassion
is the coin of faith itself. One side is the
Wheel of Dharma, “The Four Noble Truths” and
“The Eightfold Path!” The other side is the
“Wheel of Transmigration” comprised of the
“six realms of reincarnation.” Kaneko’s poem,
therefore, helps us to understand the grim
reality of karmic consequences of mankind’s
exploitation of the many things and forms of
life, such as the soil, minerals, living plants and
creatures, especially domesticated animals.

This is why immigrant Issei before WWII
often uttered the following: *Mono wa somatsu
ni shi-chyaa ikan’ noh!* ... meaning we should
not be excessive or wasteful, or greedy with the
things of life. *Mono wo ika-sanya ikan’ noh!* ...
meaning, individually and collectively, every
effort should be made in reclaiming the things
of life by making them “alive again” by making
them “useful again and again.” Such is the
positive side of transmigration and reincarnation.
This is implied by the two sides of the
single coin of faith.

continued on p. 6

Donations

continued from p. 2

SHINRAN’S WASAN

Of expressing profound indebtedness
for Amida’s Great Compassion,
Though our bodies be crushed,
we should requite it.
Also, in expressing thankfulness
to the various master-teachers,
Though our bones be shattered,
we should express gratitude!

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 59.
rkt translation.

Due to limited space due to Postal restrictions, if your
donation is not listed in this GASSHO, it will be listed in
a following edition. For any inadvertent misspelling of
names, please accept our apologies.

SACRED BUDDHIST PASSAGES

“Respect, humility, contentment, gratitude, and listening from time to time to the doctrine preached; this is the highest bliss’ (Sn. 265). Gratitude is thus spoken of in high terms, it is regarded as one of the most blissful mental conditions.”
S. Tachibana. *Ethics of Buddhism*. p. 160.

There are now scholars and specialists who are critical of the Buddhism that the Issei brought with them as being nothing more than an “ethno-centric Buddhism” and a “funerary Buddhism.” This assessment is most unfortunate. For without considering how the Issei were denied citizenship, ownership of property, discriminated against, why they were racially segregated on the plantations and why they settled in ethnically enclaved neighborhoods, the religious faith of Issei cannot be understood. Issei Buddhists are unfairly accused of having brought an “imported Buddhism” mainly based on “ancestor worship.” The implication is that the Issei were highly tribal, ethnocentric and nationalistic.

Then there are some non-Asian Buddhist scholars of recent date who have accused Japanese Buddhism to be ultra-nationalistic and militaristic. Japanese Zen in particular has been accused of brainwashing its young men during WWII not to fear death. (See Brian Daizen Victoria’s *Zen at War*. 1997.) But, upon reflection, has this not been the case with all nations ever since mankind’s known history where a nation’s god or gods have been called



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upon to justify and authorize a nation to wage war on their enemies? Throughout man’s known history have not ambitious imperialistic and militaristic nations and despots been fueled by religious platitudes and political rhetoric?

To be continued

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What does *but-ton* mean?

ANSWER: *But-ton* is a contraction of *Butsu* meaning Amida Buddha and *-on* meaning indebtedness. *On* in this instance means feelings of indebtedness to Amida for his Light of Wisdom and Life of Compassion. It is not an obligation, but a natural response of pure gratitude. For example, when one is overwhelmed by the sight and fragrance of a flower, we can only react and respond with a sigh of awe and wonder.