



GASSHO

APRIL
2010

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



WHY INFANT BUDDHA WAS BORN!

(*Shoshin Ge*: lines 21 – 24)
rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

According to Shinran Shonin's *Shoshin Ge* (lines 21-24), the underlying reason as to why the *Tathagatas* from the Realms of Eternal *Dharma* [*Tusita* heavens] keep descending into the wombs of human mothers such as that of Queen Maya Devi to be born as the infant Buddha was is as follows:

The reason for the Buddha's
appearance in the world
Is, above all, to expound
the Primal Vow of Amida,
Wide and deep as the ocean.
All beings in "the evil age
of the five defilements"
Should believe in the truth
of the Buddha's words.

Hisao Inagaki. *The Way of
Nembutsu Faith*. p. 27

In Shinran Shonin's *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho* [KGSS] the reason why this infant was born of royal parents is more specifically stated as follows:

To reveal the true teaching: It is the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*. The central purport of this sutra is that Amida, by establishing his incomparable Vows, has opened wide the dharma-storehouse, and full of compassion for small, foolish beings, he selects and bestows his treasures of virtues. ... [*The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*. (SBT-Series. Vol I p. 63)]

Shinran Shonin in saying so confirms the underlying significance of Amida as revealed by Sakyamuni in the *Larger Sutra*. He also came to appreciate the real significance of Amida's undying Compassion for "evil persons" as chronicled in the tragic story of Queen Vaidehi as documented in the *Meditation Sutra*. The heinous transgressions of Prince Ajatastru and Devadatta serve as mirrors to reveal our own past and ongoing transgressions that we are not even aware of

MONTH'S THOUGHT



... Ajatasatru refers to those possessed of blind passions ... to all those who have yet to awaken the mind aspiring for supreme, perfect enlightenment. [Alfred Bloom. "*The Ultimacy of Jodo Shinshu: Shinran's Response to Tendai*." *The Pure Land* Vol. New series. 10/11/94. p. 43.]



due to our mindless past and ongoing desecrations of things that are eternally sacred and timelessly spiritual. This story tells of how Devadatta, cousin of Sakyamuni Buddha, deceived Prince Ajatasatru into starving his one and only father, King Bimbisara, to death so he could then usurp his father's throne. In the process, the Prince almost kills his own birth mother, Queen Vaidehi, with his own sword. This is why, Shinran quotes the following significant words of Sakyamuni Buddha from the *Meditation Sutra* as follows:

Men of extremely heavy sins have no other expedient. By solely uttering the Buddha's Name, they attain Birth in the Land of Utmost

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR APRIL 2010

1st SUN APR 4th:

**HAWAII BUDDHIST
COUNCIL'S
HANAMATSURI
SERVICE**

9 a.m.

at

**Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin
1727 Pali Hwy**

No services at SKM
Please attend HBC Serv.

2nd SUN APR 11th:

Shinshu Kyokai's
Hanamatsuri Service
9 A.M. Eng. Service
Rev. Tatsuguchi

"Infant Buddha's Most Significant 7th Step!"

3rd SUN APR 18th:

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

4th SUN APR 25th :

MONTHLY
FAMILY WORSHIP
9 A.M. Eng. Service
Dharma Talk
For Children & Adults

With Deepest Sympathy

Mrs. Marian Mitsu Mita 88 Feb. 21, 2010

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

KARAOKE CLASS Mon - 7 - 9 P.M.

Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

KARATE Tues/Fri - 6 - 9 P.M.

Shihan -Walter Nishioka

FUJINKAI SEWING CLUB Wed - 9 - 11 A.M.

J. Kobuke/A. Murata

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...continued on page 6

According to Shinran, Sakyamuni appeared in this world to explain why and how a person who is hopelessly riddled by karmic defilements and transgressions can only be “saved” by trusting and taking refuge in Amida Buddha’s powers of Wisdom and virtues of Compassion. In doing so he comes to live the life of gratitude, humility and penitence as he recites Amida’s Sacred Name. This is exactly why Shinran, in referring to himself, said:

... 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.]

In other words, in this day and age of *Mappo* when the meaning and spiritual significations of life have become compromised and obscured, the only way for a karma riddled person to be “awakened” is by saying and repeating the O-nembutsu in sincere faith and profound penitence. To utter *Namoh-amida-butsu* is to say the Sacred Name of Amida in repentance, reverence and gratitude! To truly and genuinely repeat nembutsu is to “take that leap of faith,” that most crucial “seventh step,” into the all-embracing seventh *Dharma* dimension of Selflessness and Togetherness, to then retrace the “six steps” of sensuality back, as did Infant Buddha, into one’s karma riddled self in reflective penitence. This “retracing of one’s steps” is to see and “awaken” to the undeniable actuality as to how our thoughts, volitions, words and actions are constantly being tainted by our blind passions and foolish vanities. This is to see how we are shackled by our primitive six animalistic instincts, which is to see and acknowledge that we have been, are, and yet will be embraced by Amida’s Compassion until we become “free” upon entering the Pure Land.

April is the month when Buddhists in Hawaii celebrate the birth of infant Buddha who was born in India. Therefore, once again, let us re-examine in depth the “seven mythological steps” that the Buddha took as a newborn baby as soon as he “born” out from the right side his mother Queen Maya Devi to land upright standing on his feet. The mother was supported by a branch of a Sala tree that had lowered itself to keep her in the upright position as she gave birth to infant Buddha, who then appeared from the level of her heart. This

WORDS OF SHINRAN

... as expressed in the parable of the two rivers of water and fire, we are full of ignorance and blind passion. Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, **arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves.** When we, who are so shameful, go a step or two, little by little, along the White Path of the power of the Vow, we are taken in and held by the compassionate heart of the Buddha of unhindered light. ... [SBT-Series. *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*. p. 48. Note in bold Shin Buddhist view of man to his last breath of life.]

mythological accounting was to indicate that the birth of Infant Buddha was not the birth of an ordinary human being who descends from his mother’s womb and comes into this world between the thighs of their biological mothers.

Of the seven steps that the Infant Buddha took, the “seventh step,” therefore, is the most significant for it is symbolic of one’s “leap of faith” that embraces and permeates all the other “six steps,” or the six aspects of one’s sensory world within the world of *Dharma*. The “seventh step” symbolizes that “leap of faith” that a seeker of “unobstructed freedom” (*Dharma* = Truth) must take if he is to enter the Boundless World of *Dharma* full of true Light and real Life. In doing so, the very transient things of the sensory world “instantly” become sacred and spiritual. That such a “transformation” of things sensory into things sacred and insights spiritual occurs when one takes that “leap of faith.” This transformation of things sensory into spiritual insights was indicated by Infant Buddha’s “re-entering” this transitory world shackled by the “six senses” in order to sanctify and spiritualize each of the initial six steps he took retracing them to fill them all with the very Light and Life of Timeless *Dharma*, or Infinite Light (*Amitabha*) and Immeasurable Life (*Amitayus*). Therefore, the very exact spot that he first stood on his own feet, and his returning to this very exact spot has this profound significance of the *Dharma* transforming whatever our eyes see, ears hear, nose smells, tongue tastes and what our “bag of skin” touches or is touched by, as well as our thoughts and feelings. In other words, the world of *samsara* (sensuality) and the world of *Nirvana* (spirituality) are inseparable as are the “waves” to a “shoreless ocean,” though, in actuality, we are more like icebergs in the ocean melting and becoming the very waters and currents of the ocean itself.

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This “exact spot” where Infant Buddha first landed and returned to also depicts, therefore, the very center that is the hub of our very beings around which the “six realms of transmigration” revolve and are subject to and limited by our “six sense organs.” At the same time, the self is itself fully embraced by the greater World of the *Dharma*’s Boundless Wisdom and Compassion [the “seventh step”]. In other words, the life of Buddha and the life of sentient beings are One and of the same essence as are the icebergs and the ocean, being of water. This is also why Amida Buddha as the *Dharma*’s very manifestation of Infinite Light (*Amitayus*) and Boundless Life (*Amitabha*) emerges in the hearts of sentient beings. This twofold significance of Light and Life radiating in a person’s “conscienceness” triggers his “awakening of faith” to make him fully aware that he never was nor will he ever be rejected by Amida Buddha. As of consequence, such a person, in becoming illuminated by the *Dharma*’s Wisdom’s Light, becomes permeated by Amida’s Compassion, whereby he comes to take that crucial “leap of faith” (seventh step) to be filled with a “Peace of Mind,” which is to be living the life of gratitude, humility, penitence and reverence for all that gives and supports life.

This transformation of one’s “sensory conscienceness” into one’s “spiritual conscienceness” is an experience that is multidimensional wherein the past, present and future instantly become a seamless sphere of Oneness in which the past and the future as well as the matters physical, anatomical, ethical, and spiritual become realities in the ever-changing present, and yet, paradoxically, still remain distinct as the past, the present, and unfolding future, as well as the unique things and beings they are. Therefore, the very “spot” where the Infant Buddha first landed on his two feet, this “very exact spot” is of a most profound significance wherein all sentient beings, past, present and future become “actualities” in the Eternal *Dharma*’s Selflessness and Togetherness in each ongoing ever changing present moment! For this very reason, it is also the “spot” on which the Infant Buddha stood to declare with a “lions roar” that he would become the very one who would lead all mankind out of this world full of physical afflictions and mental torments into the very boundless dimensions of joy, peace and endless happiness characterized by a serenity and tranquility free of all fears, uncertainties and doubts.

Infant Buddha pointing to the boundless universe above (the Zenith) with his right hand and to the earth below [the Nadir] with his left hand, both these symbolic gestures, therefore, become of profound significance. This is why Shinran Shonin in his *Shoshin Ge* pointed out the reason as to why Sakyamuni Buddha was born in this world. Why did he do so? This was to point out that Infant Buddha in pointing to the universe above was pointing to the very World of Eternal *Dharma* from whence *Amitabha* as Wisdom’s very Light has, is and

yet will be always illuminating the “ten boundless regions” of the boundless universe. This Light of Love and Understanding ever since beginningless time has been constantly shining on all things and sentient beings in the universe to reveal to them the truths and insights of Unconditional Compassion being showered on them. And at the same time, as indicated by his left hand pointing to the earth below, we human beings also are constantly being sustained by *Amitayus* as the very source of Immeasurable Life. Therefore, all things and life forms on this earth are to be considered sacred and spiritual. This is to be also “awake” and realize that whenever a thing or life-form is destroyed, that thing or life can never be replaced.

Therefore, in order to fully grasp and clearly understand the significance of lines 21-24, of the *Shoshin Ge* we need to remember that Sakyamuni lived for some 80 years. Upon attaining enlightenment, he lived, practiced, and preached the *Dharma* for some 40 years thereafter to the last breath of his life. As of consequence, there are many things he talked about and taught that came to be documented after his death in the form of sacred scripture (*sutras*), religious commentary (*sastras*) and precepts to live by (*vinayas*). These have been collected into what is now called the *Daizokyo*, or the “Great Storehouse of Sacred Scriptures” as well as the *Issaikyo*, or the “Collection of Buddha’s Lifetime Teachings.”

They are to also called the “84,000 *Dharma* Gateways” to convey the significance that what the Buddha taught accommodates each person’s individual needs, especially his peculiar idiosyncrasies. The entire sayings and teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, therefore, were classified into various categories of Buddhist scripture. They were basically categorized into one of the “Three Baskets” called the *Tripitaka*. They are the “basket” of the Buddha’s very own words (*sutras*); the “basket” of his rules and regulations for monks and nuns (*vinaya*); and finally, the “basket” of commentaries written by various sages and masters who later wrote to expand and explain the Buddha’s most difficult teachings pertaining to principles such as “emptiness” and “self-less-ness” and so forth. The number of Buddhist sacred scripture and writings, therefore, are quite numerous and voluminous. Thus the arbitrary number “84,000” was chosen to indicate their innumerable number. The Bible, by comparison, is comprised of just 39 books (it excludes certain texts, such as the Gnostic Gospels). The Bible, therefore, cannot be compared to the vast sacred literature of Buddhism which includes the scriptures and commentaries of Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.

Out of all these numerous Mahayana *sutras*, three were selected to be the underlying foundations central for Pure Land teachings about taking the leap of faith. The *Sutra on Immeasurable Life* became the

central scripture for the liberation of the “evil person” more so than the “good person.” Jodoshinshu teaches that an “evil person,” as well as the “good person,” can be saved by simply reciting *Namoh-amida-butsu*. That an “evil person” can be saved goes against conventional religious thinking and common sense logic that assumes that only “good persons” can be saved. For in popular thinking, it is only right and just that “good people” get to go to “heaven” while “evil people” (or sinners) in the name of “divine justice” deserve to be cast into an everlasting fiery inferno.

The three Pure Land *sutras* are simply referred to as the *Triple Sutra*. They are: *The Sutra that is the Buddha’s Words on Immeasurable Life (Bussetsu Daimuryoju Kyo)*, *The Sutra that is the Buddha’s Words on Meditating On Immeasurable Life (Bussetsu Kan’ Muryoju Kyo)* and *The Sutra that are the Buddha’s Words on Amida Buddha (Bussetsu Amida Kyo)*. For easy reference, they are called: the *Larger Sutra (Dai Kyo)*, the *Meditation Sutra (Kan’ Gyo)*, and the *Smaller Sutra (the Sho Kyo)*.

To quote Shinran Shonin once again, in his chapter on the *True Teaching* in his *KGSS*, he reiterates that the Larger Sutra is the true teaching as follows:

To reveal the true teaching: It is the Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life. The central purport of this sutra is that Amida, by establishing his incomparable Vows, has opened wide the dharma-storehouse, and full of compassion for small, foolish beings, he selects and bestows his treasure of virtues. [The sutra further reveals that] Sakyamuni appeared in this world and expounded the teachings of the way to enlightenment, seeking to save the multitudes of living beings by blessing them with this benefit that is true and real. Thus to teach the Tathagata’s Primal Vow is the true intent of this sutra; the Name of the Buddha is its essence. [SBT-Series. *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*. pp 63-64]

Thus, Infant Buddha returning to “the very exact spot” where he first landed on his two feet as soon as he was born from the right side of his mother, to then take those most significant “seven steps” forward, to then “retrace” them right back to where he first landed, to then declare: “I will be the one to lead all mankind out of the ‘six realms of transmigration’ full of suffering,” this is most significant. This cosmic declaration pointed to when he, later as Sakyamuni Buddha would then reveal Amida Buddha’s All-embracing Primordial Vows for the sake of all beings as documented in the Larger Sutra. This was why he was born of noble human parents in India. The infant in becoming Sakyamuni Buddha at age 35 then explained Amida Buddha to Ananda in the Larger Sutra. This story points to the cosmic importance as to why the

SHINRAN’S WASAN

To doubt the Wisdom
of (Amida) Buddha,
T’is a transgression
grave and profound!
Instead, you should
hold fast to a heart
of penitence
By relying on the Buddha’s
Inconceivable Wisdom!
Shozomatsu Wasan 82.
rkt trans.

Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life is of the most great significance. This *sutra* contains the forty-eight Vows of the bodhisattva Dharmakara who fulfilled them all and become, therefore, Amida Buddha who keeps “saving” especially “evil persons” who are incapable of saving themselves through any physical, moral or religious means based on their own virtues. For this reason, the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life* is most central and foundational to Jodoshinshu teachings.

In this *sutra*, Sakyamuni Buddha makes it clear that in each cosmic cycle there have always been and will always be Buddhas like Amida Buddha who unflinching keep appearing in the various realms of transmigration to grasp, embrace and return with them to their Pure Lands full of True Light and Real Life that bring them all Serenity and Bliss.

Therefore, the following passage alludes to Sakyamuni Buddha himself who was such a *Tathagata* residing in *Tusita* Heaven (the Boundless World of *Dharma*) who, of his own Will and Compassion (Primordial Vows), chose to descend into the person of his mother to be, Queen Maya Devi, as follows:

... Having left the heavenly palace, he descends into his mother’s womb. Soon after he is born from her right side, **he takes seven steps**. As he does so, and effulgence illuminates everywhere in the ten directions and innumerable Buddha-lands shake in six ways. [Hisao Inagaki. *Three Pure Land Sutras*. p. 228. In bold to focus on this point]

Thus appearing as such a Buddha of Immeasurable Light and Life, Infant Buddha himself appeared in this world full of defilements as a Prince to become Sakyamuni Buddha (566 – 486 B.C.). As such an incarnate Buddha in historical time Sakyamuni responded to Ananda’s question as follows:

... As the Tathagata [who has taken and retraced the “seven steps”], I regard beings of the three worlds with boundless great compassion. The

reason for my appearance in the world is to reveal the teachings of the Way and save multitudes of beings by endowing them with true benefits. [op. cite., p. 234. [] mine].

These words of Sakyamuni Buddha as documented in the *Larger Sutra* bring, then, a most profound significance concerning the miraculous birth of Infant Buddha who, as a newborn baby, took those mythological “seven steps” forward, to retrace them then back to the very exact spot where he first landed on his own two feet to declare that he would become a Buddha as quoted above, or to become the very one to reveal Amida Buddha to all mankind. For this and the reasons mentioned above, we as Buddhists gather each April to celebrate the birth of the baby Buddha.

Now the “true benefits” of Immeasurable Light and Life according to the *Larger Sutra* are contained in the Sacred Name of Amida Buddha: *Namoh-amida-butsu*. We have already explained the significance of saying Amida’s Name in absolute trust. This faith in Amida is indicted in the first two lines of the *Shoshin Ge*: “Trusting in the Immeasurable Life of the *Tathagata* [Amida], I take refuge in his Inconceivable Light” as uttered by our beloved Shinran Shonin. These initial two lines are based on Bodhisattva Vasubandhu’s declaration of his faith: “I take refuge in the *Tathagata* [Amida] whose Unimpeded Light permeates the ten directions.” Let us then examine the nature of Amida’s Light not hindered or obstructed by anything.

[to be continued]

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

Shinjin is the source
of Enlightenment,
the mother of virtues;
It nurtures all forms
of goodness,
It cuts away the net
of doubt
And breaks free from
the currents of desire;
It unfolds the supreme
enlightenment of nirvana.

From *Avatamsaka Sutra*.
Kondo & Augustine, tr. “Senchaku
Hongan Nemutsu”, The Pure Land.
New Series, No. I,
December 1984. p. 238]

QUESTION ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: Why is the “evil person” who has committed the “five deadly transgressions” and

“slandered the right Dharma” the special concern of Amida Buddha more so than a “good person?”

ANSWER: The reason is because “evil persons” like Devadatta and Prince Ajatasatru who have and continue to mindlessly commit transgressions are difficult to “cure” because of their lack of self-restraint and moral arrogance. They can be and are cured only by Amida’s powers of Great Wisdom and her virtues of Boundless Compassion. By trusting and taking refuge in Amida’s Unconditional Benevolence, such “persons who have transgressed and desecrated the *Dharma*” begin to see how they are riddled by their own self concerns and interests. More importantly, they come to see that Amida, for this very reason, has and yet keeps embracing them “just as the karma riddled they are,” to never ever forsake or abandon them till such time they finally come to attain their Buddhahood. It is when we ourselves become “aware” and “awake” of this actuality about our selves that we come to appreciate the depths of Shinran Shonin’s “awakening” when he uttered: “... **all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death.** ... [Tannisho. V Bold for emphasis]. Such a realization then also has a profound significance for our children in the present and their children’s children who are yet to be born in the future!

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