



GASSHO

JANUARY

2010

Issue No:01-10

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



Happy New Year!

MONTH'S THOUGHT



A stone, however small will sink into the water, but even a stone weighing hundreds of tons if put on a ship will float. [Monk Nagasena's reply to King Milanda's question: "it is not logical or reasonable to say that an "evil person merely by believing in Amida Buddha 'can be saved.'" (J. Takakusu. *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*. p. 166)]



SHINSHU KYOKAI MISSION

1631 S. Beretania St.

Honolulu, HI 96826

email: skm@flex.com

website: www.shinshukyokai.org

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES For JANUARY 2010

New Year's Day

Friday, JAN. 1, 2010
10 a.m. English Service

1st SUN Jan 3rd:

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

2nd SUN Jan 10th:

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

3rd SUN Jan 17th:

Goshooki Hoonko
9 A.M. Eng. Serv.
Guest Speaker:

4th SUN Jan 10th:

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

5th SUN Jan 31st:

MONTHLY FAMILY
WORSHIP
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

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

THANK YOU FOR
YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS!!

Donations

\$1000.00

Richard K & Dorothy Watase

\$300.00

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Eitaikyo 2009

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Hugh McKenzie, Minnie Saiki

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SHOSHIN GE: AN OVERVIEW

rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

First of all, let me say: *Shin'nen ake-mashite o'mede-too gozai-masu! Kotoshi mo yoroshiku onegai itashi-masu!* "May the New Year 2010 be a happy one for you and your loved ones!"

Second, may we ask you for your continued support of our temple and its activities, especially in its efforts to spread the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, and, most importantly, the *O-nembutsu* teachings of Shinran Shonin concerning what is the "truth about one's *karma* riddled self" and how "the reality of Amida Buddha's Unconditional Compassion has never ever rejected or will ever abandon *karma* riddled man!"

Third, I would also like to take this means in behalf of my wife, son Keith and his wife Jayne, daughters Karen with her husband Dwight and their daughter Marissa, and Lee with her husband Don and their son Ryan, our best to you all for "A HAPPY MEANINGFUL YEAR 2010!"

For some reason, I found myself once again recalling the days before W.W. II when Shinshu Kyokai Mission was on the Diamond Head side of what is now the Pawaa Neighborhood District Park. The Pawaa neighborhood that melded with the Sheridan neighborhood that still brings vivid memories of my childhood. I remember well the *issei* who frequented the temple before Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japan. Many wars since then have transpired. Our *issei* parents are no longer with us. *Sansei* and *yonseis* born after W.W.II have no idea as to what the Depression years of the early 1930s were like and what the *issei* as Japanese aliens, especially as plantation laborers, had to endure for the sake of their marginalized *nisei* children. They certainly were times quite different from the economic down turn we are presently experiencing because of financial rather than racial reasons.

Way back then Kaheka Street was called Aloha Lane that came to a dead end at *Pake Patch* (patches of dry and wet land farmed by a Chinese family and some Chinese bachelors). Aloha Lane then did not connect to Kapiolani Boulevard. There also was a side lane called Ahana which also came to a dead-end at *Pake Patch*. Aloha Lane in the 1930s became Kaheka

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

Carried on **the ship of the Eightfold Path**, one crosses the ocean difficult to cross. One crosses oneself, and also takes others across. For this reason, I worship Amida, the freely active one. (Words of Nagarjuna quoted by Shinran in his *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*. SBT-Series. Vol. I p. 79. Bold for focal emphasis.)

Lane. After W.W. II it was renamed Kaheka Street and extended to Kapiolani Boulevard. The Pawaa neighborhood before W.W. II then was bordered by Kapiolani Boulevard, King St., Kalakaua Avenue, Young St., Keeamoku St. and Sheridan St. In those days Keeamoku ended at King St. and did not connect with Kapiolani Boulevard. The Aloha-Ahana Lane neighborhood then melded with the Sheridan St. neighborhood that itself extended to Pensacola St., bordered by King Street and Kapiolani Boulevard. Several families from these two co-joined neighborhoods attended regular Sunday Services at *Shinshu Kiyokai Mission of Hawaii* at 1014 Aloha Lane, the dead-end of which, as mentioned, opened into the cultivated dry and wet lands fed by the artesian well that presently fills the ponds at the Pagoda Floating Restaurant.

To this day, I remember well the *issei* members who gathered on Sunday mornings to chant Shinran Shonin's *Shoshin Nembutsu Ge* (Paens of True and Real Faith in the *Nembutsu*). The chanting was led by the minister with the congregation, sitting with knees bent with the soles of their feet neatly tucked under their bottoms in the formal Japanese fashion. In this seated posture they followed the minister's lead in chanting the *Shoshin Ge*. For the *nisei* children in attendance, it was unbearable to sit in such a cramped fashion for the legs would go numb and have no feeling. So, most of us kids would sit with our legs overlapped one over the other. For there were no pews to sit on as there are today in our present temple.

Depending on the length of a minister's sermon that followed, it became even tougher for the children to sit quietly and listen to what the minister was saying in Japanese, a language practically foreign to them. This was also because after chanting the *Shoshin Ge*, several repetitions of *Namoh-amida-butsu* with a select *Wasan* (religious song) were also chanted. Then the sermon followed. The chanting, plus the sermon meant that a Sunday service could last as long as an hour and a half, or even more.

The underlying, fundamental importance and significance of "true and real faith in the *Nembutsu*" are explained in the sections of this issue's: MONTH'S

THOUGHT, WORDS OF SHINRAN, SHINRAN'S WASAN, BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES and especially in the section QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER. Please read and keep them in mind for the rest of the year 2010 for they will help you in understanding what I will be writing about concerning with the *Shoshin Nembutsu Ge* (henceforth *Shoshin Ge.*) in subsequent issues of *Gassho*.

Our *issei* parents understood the *Shoshin Ge* in classical Chinese fashion because they were able to understand the *Wasans* in classical Japanese. The underlying significance of *Shoshin Ge* is found in the following words of Shinran Shonin as quoted by Yuiembo in his *Tannisho* as follows:

"Amida's primal Vow (that is his Great Promise) does not discriminate between ... the good and evil (person); **true entrusting alone is essential.** The reason is that **the Vow is directed to the being burdened with the weight of karmic evil and burning with the flames of blind passion.** ... **no other form of good is necessary, for there is no good that surpasses the nembutsu** (Amida's Sacred Name). And evil need not be feared, for **there is no evil which can obstruct the working of Amida's Primal Vow** (that is the activity of Wisdom's Pure Light full of Unconditional Compassion for all.) [T. Unno. *Tannisho* I. p. 5. () mine for clarifying Shin faith. In bold to indicate the underlying basis of Shin faith.]

Such a person who has taken refuge in Amida's Great Promise never ever to abandon karma riddled beings becomes assured of their Buddhahood. This "taking of refuge," therefore, is most fundamental and essential to one's "awakening of true and real faith." That Amida Buddha does not reject, forsake or abandon the person riddled by "evils" who has so taken refuge in him, this significance of true faith is repeatedly lauded throughout the verses of the *Shoshin Ge* by Shinran Shonin.

That "evil persons" are not rejected, this is not the case in Christianity where sinners, on a Day of Final Judgment, are to be rejected. This becomes undeniably clear in reading the following words of Jesus:

... whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father which is in heaven. [Matthew 10: 33 KJV]

These words of Jesus make it clear that in the Abrahamic religions, "sinners," in the end, are to be rejected and cast into hell. This point becomes quite clear when Jesus says, "Depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." [Matthew 25:41]. This final rejection also becomes clear upon reading the many parables of Jesus in which he

clearly distinguishes between "good persons" and "evil persons," such as in his parables about the "wheat" and the "tares" and the "sheep" and the "goats." For the tares and goats, in the end, are rejected and cast into an incinerating inferno of fire.

So, it becomes interesting to also note the significance of the "fish" as a symbol to indicate that one is a Christian. The "fish symbol" that indicates that those who wear it or display it are followers of Christ who see themselves as "fishers of men." That is, they have become "proselytizers" whose object is to "convert" non-Christians over to "Christ." The meaning is clear, they are "fishing for non-believers," so they can "recruit" them over to Christianity.

That "sinners" ultimately will be rejected is especially clarified by the *Parable of the Net* as follows:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered "of every kind;" which, when it was full they drew to shore, and sat down, and **gathered the good** into vessels, **but cast the bad out. So shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.**

[Matthew 13: 47-50. In bold to distinguish between the "faith" required by Jesus in himself as being The Son of God the Savior and Redeemer of men and what it is to "entrust" one's *karma* riddled self to Amida Buddha's transformative powers of Wisdom that discriminates not between a "good person" and the "evil person," but equally illumines to enlighten them both according to their needs and situation.]

Thus, for those who wish to learn of Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings about Amida Buddha as documented in the *Larger Sutra* and summarized in Shinran Shonin's *Shoshin Ge*, urges a person to trust and take refuge in Amida Buddha. In doing so, it becomes necessary for such a person to keep in mind the difference between "faith in Christ" means and what it is "to take complete refuge in Amida Buddha's Vows of Compassion."

For this reason I hope to devote this year's remaining eleven issues of *Gassho* to discuss the *Shoshinge Nembutsu Ge* to clarify what is meant by "faith" in Christianity and as to what an "awakening of faith" that Shinran Shonin experienced is all about. For "faith" as made possible by the powers and virtues of Amida's Sacred Name actually enables us "to take complete refuge in Amida Buddha" by uttering "*Namoh-amida-butsu*" in gratitude and reverence. The uttering of nembutsu can be but only one's heartfelt expressions of indebtedness to Amida. In doing so you will gain an understanding of what is "true, real, authentic and

sincere faith." Jodoshinshu teachings is about taking refuge in Amida. In doing so you will become a person of heartfelt gratitude, humility, especially a person of penitence that paradoxically brings him joy and peace of mind.

Devout Shin Buddhists, therefore, begin their day by chanting the *Shoshin Ge* each morning before their family shrine. Then, they gather again before their family *Butsudan* (Amida Shrine) before going to bed to chant the *Shoshin Ge* once again. Less devoted ones merely chant a short *sutra* or recite the O-nembutsu several times. In Amida's eyes, all are equally accepted.

[To be continued]

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

In reflecting on **the ocean of shinjin** (into which all sentient beings are returning.) I realize that **there is no discrimination between noble and humble, or black-robed monks and white-clothed laity**, no differentiation between man or woman, old and young.

The amount of evil one has committed is not considered, the duration of any performance of religious practice is of no concern.

It is a matter of neither practice nor good acts, neither sudden attainment nor gradual attainment, neither meditative practice nor non-meditative practice, **neither right contemplation nor wrong contemplation**, neither daily life nor the moment of death, **neither many-calling nor once-calling**.

It is simply shinjin that is inconceivable, inexplicable and indestructible. **It is the medicine that eradicates all poisons. The medicine of the Tathagata's Vow destroys the poisons of our wisdom and foolishness.** [*Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*. SBT-Series. Vol. II p. 249. In bold for focal emphasis. () mine.]

QUESTION AND ANSWER KORNER

Question: What is the significance of saying and uttering Amida's Sacred Name?

Answer: Sakyamuni Buddha (566-486 B.C.) set forth the Four Noble Truths. They are truths that acknowledge that: (1) life is full of suffering, (2) there are causes and reasons as to why people experience torment and suffering; (3) once the cause and reasons are pin-pointed, their solutions can be found; and finally, (4) the solution is found by following the Eightfold Noble Path (or the Eight Correct Ways of Living one's life).

SHINRAN'S WASAN

This "ocean of suffering"
full of unending births
and ceaseless deaths
In which we long have been
sinking and drowning,
Amida's Universal Vow
is the only Ship
that can ferry us over
this ocean of suffering!

Koso Wasan No 7
rkt trans

A careful analysis of the Eightfold Noble Path reveals that a human being is born with a mind, body and, most importantly, a conscience. The "mind" involves the paths of "Right Knowing" and "Right Thinking" which involves the inner domain of a person's conscious thoughts, sentiments, desires and motivations. The "body" involves the paths of "Right Speaking," "Right Doing," "Right earning of one's Livelihood" and "Right Effort." They involve positive and/or negative *karmic* consequences that follow what a person has said and done. And finally, one's "conscience" involves the paths of "Right Reflection" on one's self as illuminated by one's "Right Contemplation" on things that are actual and true; that is, on things that are eternally sacred and truths that are timelessly spiritual. The Hindu yogin points out that there is an inner dimension in which the "SOUND" not made by two sticks striking each other is heard and should be "listened" to, the "voiceless voices" of Amida Buddha.

Thus, the Eightfold Path in this profound sense is Amida's "voiceless voice" saying to a person that he must be responsible for what he is thinking, feeling and intending, for he, because of the facts of causation, conditionality and interdependency, he will not escape the consequences of what he has thought, said and done, whether they are intentional or unintentional. This is because the consequences of *karma* always follow a person "as a shadow that never leaves him." This is why in the Buddha's lifetime, monks and nuns were held to some three hundred plus precepts of the homeless life of which the laity was held accountable for only the Five Basic Precepts (not to kill, steal, lie, fornicate and ingest harmful food and drink).

By the time of *Shinran Shonin* (1173-1263 A.D.), even the minimal Five Precepts had become impossible to live by. It was Shinran who finally came to the "realization" that it was only through "Correctly Visualizing" Amida Buddha's Infinite Wisdom's Light with its life's giving and affirming Compassion that a person

comes to be unconditionally embraced as a person full of problems, contradictions and paradoxes. This is why he said of himself: "... 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." [Taitesu Unno. *Tannishho*: Epilogue. P. 36.] To say *Namo-amida-butsu* is to Rightly Contemplate Amida Buddha.

This realization of Shinran, in my personal view, came about because Shinran approached the Noble Eightfold Path first through the path of "Right Contemplation" that is "to think of" Amida Buddha as being the Ultimate Manifestation of the *Dharma's* Immeasurable Life and Inconceivable Light. The vision of Amida as Light and Life comes through "envisioning" Amida Buddha, his Vows and his Pure Land. Otherwise, as Shinran Shonin confesses, without the thought of Amida, he would never have been able to "Rightly Reflect" on his *karma* riddled self that, in reality, incapable of "Rightly Knowing," "Rightly Thinking."

Therefore, he also would be incapable of knowing of the moral and ethical standards regarding "Rightly Speaking," "Rightly Doing," "Rightly earning one's Livelihood" and "Rightly Enduring" in this world where the weaker constantly are being devoured by the stronger in gross and in the most subtle of ways.

The only way out, he suddenly realized, was through living a life of *O-nembutsu* gratitude and humility, especially a life of penitence clearly illuminated by the Light of Amida's Wisdom that has tirelessly and continues to illuminate him to enfold him in a Compassion that has never or will ever forsake or abandon him.

Reciting *Nembutsu*, therefore, entails this "thought" and "vision" of Amida Buddha who enables one to Rightly Reflect on one's imperfect self as made possible by first Rightly Contemplating (visualizing) on his Vows of Amida to never abandon, forsake or reject any sentient being riddled by karmic evils. This Contemplation makes possible such self Reflections that paradoxically, awaken a *karma* riddled person that has been unconditionally embraced by Amida. This realization frees such a person of all his doubts, fears, and uncertainties. Such a person, therefore, experiences an "awakening of true and real faith" (or *Sho-shin*). Thus, the ***Sho-shin*** in *Shoshin Nembutsu Ge* expresses Shirnan Shonin's "awakening of faith" in religious verse and song full of Joy, Gladness, and Peace of Mind!

Donations
continued from page 2

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Shinshu Kyokai Mission of Hawaii

General Membership Meeting

Sunday

February 21, 2010

10:30 am at the Social Hall

Please Save this Date and Attend
this Important Meeting

Lucky Number Prizes

\$5.00 per person

FREE

80 yrs. and over
or under 12 yrs

ANNOUNCEMENT

Temple/Elevator Will be Open
All Day

December 31, 2009 and
January 1, 2010

Please enter from Young St

To access the temple during regular days
Please go to the office for key
M-F 9am to 5pm

Sat. and Sun 9am to Sunset