



GASSHO

JUNE
2010

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



THE RAYS OF AMIDA'S LIGHT

(*Shoshin Ge*: lines 11-16)
rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

In last month's GASSHO, we discussed Shan'tao's parable of the "White Path and The Two Contra-flowing Rivers of Fire and Water." We spoke of Amida's Inconceivable Wisdom that cannot be "seen" with one's "naked eye" ("naked traveler" = raw sensations = 5 sense organs) because it is a "voiceless voice" calling us from the "Other Side" of the two rivers. This is because our "inner thoughts" (brain = 6th sense organ) are constantly being "clouded" by our self vanities and self justifications full of biases and prejudices. This is why our thoughts, words and actions conflict with that of others who are also gripped by their own misperceptions and misunderstandings. This condition of being "all too human," then, muffles the "inner ears of our conscience" to make our hearts unresponsive and our minds indifferent to the cries and suffering of others, especially of those who are total strangers. As of consequence, one's thoughts and emotions also become indifferent and insensitive to the sacredness in things that are also spiritual as well. Thus, our lives become full of contradictions as well as irreverence and desecrations.

Our delusions about our selves and illusions about others keep generating thoughts like a volcano spewing burning cinders and hot ash as well as sentiments as cold as glaciers frozen in greed full of insatiability! Our thoughts, therefore, are rendered spiritually deaf to the SOUNDS not made by two sticks rubbing or striking against each other as we logicalize and intellectualize. Our feelings, as of consequence, become like jagged rocks grinding against each other as they become hurtful words and harmful actions that are illogical and irrational.

Nevertheless, the Wisdom and Compassion of the *Dharma* Sun, like the sun hidden by the storm clouds below it keeps penetrating through them to equally illuminate all that is on the earth below. This, in Shan'tao's parable, is likened to Amida's "voiceless voice" resounding through the dark clouds of man's blind passions and self vanities to lay bare his shameful transgressions and desecrations of things sacred and spiritual. These passions and vanities in the parable

MONTH'S THOUGHT



In our long life there are bound to be times when we slack off when we are not as conscientious as we might be. This is, of course, because we are imperfect human beings, and that is what the term **bombu** means. Things don't always go the way we want. And depending on what others do to us, we become angry and hot under the collar. This is truly very humiliating, and something we must be ashamed of. [Yoshitaka Tamai. *Ichinyo*. p. 17]



have been characterized to be like unrelenting bandits, robbers, falsifiers, seducers, predator beasts, venomous creatures, pesky insects, brambles, thorns, etc. who wish to kill the "naked traveler."

In this parable, man's burning passions are likened to cascading waves of incinerating fire, while his self vanities are likened to waves of freezing water. Both rivers are constantly engulfing man's animal sensuality and ethical sensibilities to obscure his "deepest spiritual conscienceness" depicted as the White Path. As the contra-flowing rivers of "fire" and "water" keep rolling over the White Path they keep crashing into each other to explode into plumes of swirling red hot cinders and scorching ash

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES for JUNE- 2010

1st SUN JUN 6th:

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

2nd SUN JUN 13th:

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

3rd SUN JUN 20th:

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

4th SUN JUN 27th:

MONTHLY
FAMILY WORSHIP
9 A.M. Eng. Service
Dharma Talk
Rev. Tatsuguchi

With Deepest Sympathy
to the families of

Mrs. Jane C. Segawa 86yr. April 3, 2010
Mr. Lester Tsukasa Kato 91yr. May 9, 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 8

(uncontrollable anger, rage and hatreds). In this mixing, freezing mist and fog also billow to suffocate him with his burning conceit, pride, vanity, and freezing selfishness and insatiability. In this mix all sight of truth, reason, sensibility, humanity and compassion are lost.

According to Shinran Shonin, however, the World of the *Dharma* Sun keeps breaking through the dark storm clouds to disperse even the billows of hot ash and freezing fog to reveal the Path right before a person's feet. The *Dharma* Sun, in doing so, reveals that the White Path connects "our world" with the "Pure Land" of Amida. In doing so, the *Dharma* Sun reveals that "this side of the river" full of pain and torment and the "Other Side" of Tranquility and Bliss are both fully and equally embraced within the Boundless Universe of *Dharma* like the sun above the dark clouds shining through on both sides of the rivers of fire and water. In doing so, the White Path appears right before the "naked traveler" as Amida's Sacred Name as her "voiceless voice" that is resounding throughout the "ten endless directions" of the Cosmos. This is why the Light of *Dharma* is said to equally illuminate both sides of the rivers of fire and water as it keeps revealing each step on the White Path that leads to the Pure Land.

Under the Light of Wisdom we human beings became aware of those who are undeniably in the grips of greed, resentments and vanities. This Light of the *Dharma's* Wisdom appears in our "deepest conscienceness" as Amida Buddha's Mind of Sincerity and her Heart of Benevolence (*makoto no kokoro*). It is by the virtues and powers of this Mind and Heart that the SOUNDS not made by two sticks rubbing or striking against each other comes to "resound" in one's "deepest conscienceness." These SOUNDS, as mentioned, are the "voiceless voices" of Sakyamuni and Amida that are "eternally calling out to us" from the Boundless Dimensions of Real Life and True Light. The Source of Truth's Light comes from the "Other Side" of the rivers of fire and water in the form of Amida's Sacred Name depicted as a White Path between the rivers of billowing fire and cascading water. True Wisdom and Pure Compassion does not come from our side of the two rivers that is replete with moral defilements and spiritual darkness (bandits, tricksters, seducers, etc). The "Other Side" is the Pure Land full of enlightened Bodhisattvas and celestial beings. The Pure Land, therefore, is also likened to a "shoreless ocean" from which such Bodhisattvas and divine beings

WORDS OF SHINRAN

In people who have long heard the Buddha's Name and said the nembutsu, surely there are signs of rejecting the evil of this world and signs of their desires to cast off the evil in themselves. When people first begin to hear the Buddha's Vow, they wonder, having become thoroughly aware of the karmic evil in their hearts and minds, how they will ever attain birth as they are. To such people we teach that **since we are possessed of blind passion, the Buddha receives us without judging whether our hearts are good or bad.** [*Letters of Shinran*. No. 20. p. 61. Bold for emphasis.]

constantly keep emerging to enter this world and return with sentient beings to the Pure Land. Therefore, the White Path is also the Way *karma* riddled beings can return to the *Dharma* Ocean to become its very waters and currents of "unobstructed freedom" full of Selflessness and Togetherness!

Sadly, however, as long as our minds and hearts continue to be frozen cold by selfishness and burning with uncontrollable desires, it will be impossible for us to "see" and visualize" the Pure Land that is fully within the Boundless, Spherical *Dharma* World. As of consequence, because of our blinding passions and burning vanities we find it most difficult to take refuge in Amida Buddha. This is because we are constantly assailed by "doubts" concerning Amida's "voiceless voice" as coming from the World of SOUNDS not made by two sticks rubbing against each other or jagged rocks grinding against each other. Our eardrums in and of themselves alone are incapable of hearing the "soundless" reverberations of the sacredness in things "resounding" with the most subtle spiritual insights and truths that are beyond what our eyeballs can see and what our eardrums can hear. For *Namoh-amida-butso* is the SOUND sublime that is heard only through the "ears of one's conscience" and not through one's "eardrums." Such SOUNDS cannot be seen by the eyes nor grasped by one's hands for they are formless.

Let us then look now at lines 11 – 16 of the *Shoshinge*. Professor Hisao Inagaki translates them as follows:

Amida sends forth universally
the **immeasurable**
and **boundless** Light,
The **unimpeded, incomparable**
and **majestically**
flaming Light,
The **Pure** Light,
the Light of **Joy**,

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the Light of **wisdom**,
 The **unceasing, inconceivable**,
 and **ineffable** Light,
 And the light **outshining**
the sun and the moon;
 With these Lights
 he illumines the
 innumerable worlds.
 All sentient beings
 are shone upon
 by this Light.
 [Hisao Inagaki.
The Way of Nembutsu Faith.
 p. 20. In bold to indicate
 the twelve aspects of Amida's Light.]

Let us then look for the meanings or the *Dharma* manifesting itself in these twelve ways of Wisdom's Illuminating Light.

We get a clue about the *Dharma's* Wisdom's universal Light radiating it's Boundless Compassion from the twelfth and thirteenth Vows of Amida's forty-eight Vows as follows:

(12th) If, when I attain Buddhahood, my light should be limited, unable to illuminate at least a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of Buddha-lands, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(13th) If, when I attain Buddhahood, my life-span should be limited, even to the extent of a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of kalpas, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. [Hisao Inagaki. *The Three Pure Land Sutras.* pp. 243, 244]

That Amida Buddha as the Bodhisattva *Dharmakara* fulfilled each one of his forty-eight Vows means that he has also actualized Vows 12 and 13 into Reality. This also means that *Dharmakara* has become and is now Amida Buddha who is eternally radiating the *Dharma's* Infinite Light of Wisdom (as *Amitayus*). This also means that *Dharmakaya* has become the Buddha endlessly affording all sentient beings the full benefits of her Unconditional Compassion (as *Amitabha*). Amida, for these two reasons, is like a single coin, one side being Infinite Wisdom and the other side being Boundless Compassion. The Light of Wisdom and the Life of Compassion, therefore, are singular and inseparable. They are one and the same. Both are unfathomable manifestations of the *Dharma's* Light and Life.

For this reason, Amida Buddha is lauded as being the *Dharma's* Inconceivable Light and its Immeasurable life that pervade throughout the ten endless directions of the universe. This is to confirm that sentient beings throughout the endless "ten directions" and "unbounded regions" of the universe

are, without exceptions, within the one and same *Dharma* Universe. Sentient beings are even now being illuminated and transformed by the *Dharma's* True Light of Selflessness. This is why Amida Buddha is the very manifestation of the *Dharma's* Wisdom that is revered as bringing about also the Real Life of Togetherness full of Unconditional Compassion for all sentient beings in which none are excluded or rejected! This why all things and all forms of life, in actuality, are inseparable interconnected and interdependent. This is why, ethically and spiritually all things are to be revered as sacred and spiritual.

Therefore, wherever and whenever the Light and Life of the *Dharma* is being defiled or defied, superstitions, misconceptions and falsehoods abound and flourish. To desecrate life is like tying "knots" on a length of rope called the *Dharma* on which there were originally no such "knots." In trusting and taking refuge in the power of the *Dharma's* Wisdom full of Compassion, instead of cutting off the "knots of our karma" on the "rope of our lives," Amida unties them to free us from their suffocating and strangling hold on us. This was the purpose and reason for Amida fulfilling his forty-eight Vows of Unconditional Compassion, his Eighteenth Vow to especially embrace and save the "unsavable ones" by "uniting" instead of "cutting" off the "knots" that are strangling our life! In having so consummated his Vows, the very basis for the "transformation" of both the "good person" and especially the "evil person" is now a reality. *Karma* riddled beings can now step on to walk the White Path over to the Western side of the two rivers of fire and water to share in a life of Selflessness and Togetherness, or "*Nirvana* without residues." As Shinran said, "--- whether you accept nembutsu, entrusting yourself to it, or reject it, that is your decision." (T. Unno: *Tannisho.* p. 7).

Therefore, lines 11-16 of the *Shoshinge* are based on the following verses of the *Larger Sutra* as follows:

The Buddha said to Ananda, "The majestic light of the Buddha Amitayus is the most exalted. No other Buddha's light can match his. The light of some Buddhas illuminates a hundred Buddha-lands, and that of others, a thousand Buddha-lands. Briefly, that of Amitayus illuminates the eastern Buddha-lands, as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges. In the same way, it illuminates the Buddha-lands in the south, west, and north, in each of the four intermediate directions, above and below. Further, the light of some Buddhas extends seven feet; that of others, one yojana, or two, three, four or five yoyanas; and the distance covered increases in this way until the light of some Buddhas illuminates one Buddha-land.

For this reason, Amitayus is called by the following names: the Buddha of **Infinite Light**, the Buddha of **Boundless Light**, the Buddha of **Unhindered Light**, the Buddha of **Incomparable Light**, the Buddha of **the Light of the King of Flame**, the Buddha of **Pure Light**, the Buddha of **Light of Joy**, the Buddha of the **Light of Wisdom**, the Buddha of **Unceasing Light**, the Buddha of **Inconceivable Light**, the Buddha of **Ineffable Light**, and the Buddha of the **Light Outshining the Sun and the Moon**.

If sentient beings encounter his light, their three defilements are removed, they feel tenderness, joy and pleasure; and good thoughts arise. If sentient beings in the three realms of suffering see his light, they will all be relieved and freed from affliction. **At the end of their lives, they all reach emancipation.** [H. Inagaki. *loc. cite.*, p. 255. Bold to point out nature of Dharma's Light as Truth itself.]

The Buddha here tells Ananda that *Amitayus* as the Clear Light of Wisdom cannot be completely explained because it is inexhaustible. Then, Sakyamuni begins to speak of Amida also as *Amitabha* whose Life, likewise, is boundless, immeasurable and inexhaustible. Therefore, it is impossible to fully measure or quantify or conceptualize or describe these Sources of Light and Life to one's complete intellectual satisfaction.

Inagaki sensei's translation above can be reduced to the terms that I have set in bold above as follows: (1) immeasurable, (2) boundless, (3) unimpeded, (4) incomparable, (5) majestically flaming, (6) pure, (7) joy, (8) wisdom, (9) unceasing, (10) inconceivable, (11) ineffable, and finally, (12) outshining the sun and the moon. The significance of these designations tells us that Amida's Light is most extraordinary and "supra-mundane," therefore, it is impossible to make logical or empirical sense of it or to put in words. Especially is this so concerning the Vow to save the "evil person" who has and continues to commit "the five deadly transgressions" and, surprisingly, even those who have "desecrated the Right Dharma." In common sense logic and conventional religion, such people are "unsavable." Many think or believe that "sinners" or "heinous criminals" deserve to be cast into a fiery, everlasting eternal "hell" because they are incorrigible.

The following explanations of Amida Buddha's twelve attributes of Light below are mainly based on *Kangaku Shinryu Umehara sensei's Shoshin Nembutsu Ge Kogi [Lectures on the Gathas on True Faith and Nembutsu (1950) pp. 74-78]*. As appropriate, *Kangaku Katsumi Yoshiyama's Shoshin Ge wo Yomu [To Read the Shoshin Ge (2nd. 2008) pp. 33-53]* and

SHINRAN'S WASAN

One should take refuge
in Amida's Primal Vow.
Those who trust
in the Primal Vow,
are established,
By its power and virtues,
in its correct state.
They will all finally attain the
Supreme Enlightenment!

Shozomatsu Wasan #1
rkt trans.

Dr. Hisao Inagaki's *The Way of Nembutsu-Faith* [(1996) pp. 20-22] will be consulted. Shinran Shonin's *Jodo Wasans* 1 – 15 were also be consulted.

Immeasurable Light (*Muryo Ko*) means Amida's Light cannot be quantified or measured as done in the sciences that base their observations on empirical measures and quantifications that then are regarded as facts based on scientific data. In other words, the Light of *Dharma* illuminates more than what concerns the world of man's (1) instincts and desires, (2) shapes, forms, sounds, odors, tastes, touch sensations, etc., and (3) the non-visible and non-tangible aspects of his subjective and abstract experiences full of assumptions, speculations, suppositions and assumptions. The Light of Wisdom connects man's thoughts, feelings, words and actions to things sacred and spiritual. So, the Light of Wisdom not only illuminates the things of the sense and intellect but also with the sacred and spiritual as well.

Boundless Light (*Muhen Ko*) is the Light of *Dharma* manifest as Amida Buddha in the form of Wisdom that is not impeded nor hindered by any thing, whether it be sensory, physical, mental, verbal, or even celestial or demonic. This is why the Light of Amida permeates and pervades to illuminate the ten boundless regions as well as the ten endless directions of the universe to "resound" in man's "deepest conscienceness" in which all things past and future are seen in the ongoing present.

Unimpeded Light (*Muge Ko*) also means that the rays of Amida's Light are not blocked or impeded by any thing physical, emotional, intellectual or illusory or delusory thing. In essence, it means that passions, vanities and even *karmic* evils ("five deadly transgressions" and "desecrations of *Dharma*") cannot prevent the *Dharma's* Wisdom's Light from breaking through even the darkest of things as well as the most hellish of beings to "transform their bitterness into the

very "sweetness" of Serenity like when a green persimmon turns into a mellow one without destroying the persimmon itself. Hatred is transformed by compassion alone, not by more hatreds!

Incomparable Light (*Mutai Ko*). This designation means that there is no light that can compare, match or exceed the virtues and powers of Amida as the *Dharma's* very Light full of Unconditional Compassion that especially grasps to embrace those who are hopelessly "riddled by their *karmic* evils," those destined for endless rounds of hellish existences, instead, by bringing them into the Pure Land.

Majestically Flaming Light (*Koen O*). This description of Amida as Pure Light refers to the power of the *Dharma's* Wisdom in "transforming" the evils in people into good as being a "noble" and "regal" power. This transformative process can also be likened to icebergs already melting in the ocean of *Dharma* as they becoming the very "waters" and "currents" of an "ocean without any shores." Because of these noble virtues of Amida's Light, it is praised as being a "Majestic Flaming Light" that is most regal.

The next three: **Pure Light** (*Shojo Ko*), **Light of Joy** (*Kangi Ko*) and **Wisdom's Light** (*Chie Ko*) refer to the tireless working and ceaseless activity of Amida in "awakening" and "transforming" sentient beings through the virtues of his Sacred Name: *Namoh-Amida-Butsu*. To be "transformed" by the powers and virtues of this Light is quite a subtle process because it does not shine only on certain "things" or on certain "sentient beings" such as on only "good people" and not on "evil persons."

Sentient beings, therefore, are likened to countless drops of dew that keep mysteriously appearing with each morning's dawning sun, to become then the bright rolling clouds of vibrant youth, which then become the greying clouds of aging, to finally become the dark rain clouds releasing drops of rain that fall into the the eternal calm of the Sea of Tranquility and Serenity. In doing so, whether they are white as snow or dark as hailstones, each snowflake or hailstone, in returning to the sea, become the very free flowing currents and waters of the shoreless ocean, or *Nirvana* without any residues. Each drop of rain, snowflake, or hailstone in returning to the sea is not, in the process, destroyed nor turned into a "nothingness," or something else!

This is also like untying the "knots" on a length of rope, a process that does not destroy it. But cutting off the "knots" will do so! These allegories of a "shoreless ocean" a persimmon and a "knotless" rope then, convey the significance of Amida's All Illuminating Wisdom and his All-embracing Compassion that guides and leads us back to the Pure Land that rejects not any sentient being as they become the very waters

and currents of an ocean like when a raindrop falls into the sea!

It is an undeniable fact that human beings are constantly being driven by their inner motivations, emotions and feelings that trigger sub-conscious responses and subliminal reactions that are of a self justifying and self affirming kind. And, as of consequence, the conscious thoughts, sentiments, speech and actions of human beings are all characterized by their underlying self vanities and subconscious pride. Therefore, when they are deprived of instant sensory gratifications or frustrated in getting their way, human beings quickly become full of vain complaints, excuses and even burning resentments and hatreds that drive them to acts of uncontrollable rage, even violence.

Instead of "looking" to Amida and "listening" to her "voiceless voice" deep within, they, instead, blame others and extenuating circumstances for their problems. Or, they tranquilize themselves by indulging themselves in sensuality, whether physical, psychological, or even extra terrestrial, to deaden the pain of reality. By pinpointing the "actual causes" and "real reasons," Amida, instead, leads people to their "awakening of faith" in terms of their own given situation and individual needs. By stepping on and walking on the White Path of True Joy and Real Life, such a person, though constantly assailed by the torments and contradictions in his life, becomes, instead, a person full of gratitude, humility and penitence as Amida begins "untying" the "knots" to make his "rope of life" free of kinks and tangles by unraveling them all.

Thus, Shinran Shonin urges us all to take refuge in the wonders of Amida's Light full of virtues and power that can "transform" our ingratitude into gratitude, arrogance into humility, and impertinence into penitence. The following *Wasans* (religious verse) indicate that he had done so.

Wisdom's Light is
most immeasurable.
None, whose natures
that are lacking
and defective
Are left untouched and
not transformed
by this Light!

Boundless is the aura
of this liberating Light!
All are embraced within
its radiating Light!
One becomes free
from "this" or "that!"
Take, therefore, refuge
in this Light that
equalizes all things!

Thus, Shinran Shonin says that by "taking refuge" in Amida's Wisdom's very Light, one comes to be "freed" by the Light of Wisdom that lays bare a person's envy, resentments and arrogance to "transform" them then into gratitude, indebtedness, humility and penitence. This is why it is a Light whose "transformative" powers and virtues defies all common sense, logic and reason. This is like a tangled rope full of knots that becomes suddenly unknotted and untangled.

Unceasing Light (*Fudan Ko*). The term "unceasing," therefore, is of significance here because this means that Amida, being the very manifestation of the *Dharma's* Wisdom, is constantly, tirelessly and unfailingly illuminating to embrace us all in the safety and protection of the *Dharma's* Truth's Light. Though we ourselves are unable to see or fathom her unending efforts of Compassion to save us all, his Name keeps resounding deep in our hearts as a "voiceless voice" forever calling us to step on and begin walking the White Path. This is the meaning of Infinite Light and Boundless Compassion that has become a "voiceless voice." This means that Amida Buddha has vowed never to forsake, reject, abandon or condemn any being, especially those helplessly riddled by their irreversible *karmic* evils.

That human beings are unable to see this source of Timeless Light and Boundless Life that has, is and yet continues to radiate True Wisdom full of Boundless Compassion throughout the "ten directions," this is attested to by Shinran's following *Wasan*:

Though my eyes are
blinded by passions,
And unable to see
its Illumination that
keeps embracing me,
Its Great Compassion,
unhindered, steady,
Constantly and always
shines tirelessly on me!

KosoWasan 95 rkt trans.

What these words of Shinran mean to say is that Amida Buddha is the very manifestation of the *Dharma's* Wisdom and Compassion that fails us not. As mentioned, Amida as Eternal Light and Life is forever illuminating the "ten endless directions" and "boundless regions" of the universe to embrace each and all sentient beings without exceptions or rejections, especially the "*karma* riddled ones."

In a former issue of GASSHO, I explained, therefore, why those who keep "committing the five deadly transgressions" and keep "slandering the Right *Dharma*," in actuality are the very ones who are keeping

themselves in the darkness of their own spiritual ignorance by their continual transgressions and desecrations. I made it clear that it is not Amida who is the one excluding them, but they themselves who are preventing themselves from believing, trusting and taking refuge in Amida Buddha who has never or will ever abandon them. As long as we continue in our desecrations of things sacred and defiance of spiritual Truths, it is we who are the very ones keeping ourselves from believing, trusting and taking refuge in the unceasing Benevolence and Beneficence of Amida Buddha. We are living in a burning house whose windows are closed and whose door is locked by our egos that keep shutting out what is True Light and Real Life of the *Dharma* from entering our hearts to illuminate our conscience!

This is why Amida is the Light that keeps penetrating our true natures to illuminate and embrace our *karmic* evils just as they are to transform them. This is also why Amida as Unconditional Compassion, embraces us as the *karma* riddled beings we can only be until such time that we arrive on the Other Shore, the Pure Land when we will attain Buddhahood.

This is why Amida is **Inconceivable Ineffable Light** (*Fukashigi Ko*). Both designations mean that Amida as the very Light of the *Dharma's* Wisdom defies any attempt to conceptualize or describe it with words. For, this Wisdom Light, in being Universal and All-embracing, also defies any attempt to classify, categorize or differentiate it philosophically or theologically. It cannot be set in terms of doctrines or creeds that set things and people against or apart from each other, such as "the forces of light" described as being in mortal combat to the death against the "forces of evil." For the *Dharma* Truth does not discriminate between one's "allies" (good people) and one's "enemies" (evil people). For people are people wherever they are over the passing endless generations.

Finally, the **Light Outshining the Sun and Moon** (*Cho-nichi-gak' Ko*) is a metaphor of universal cosmic significance. The brightest thing we can see during the light of day is the blazing sun. And the brightest thing we see in the dark of night is the full moon when it is completely illuminated by the sun on the other side of the rotating earth in the same vast Cosmos full with trillions of other galaxies. This *Dharma* Sun, therefore, is the very Light of Wisdom full of Compassion for all beings throughout the "ten directions" of the entire shoreless regions of the Cosmos. When our hearts become so illuminated by Amida as the manifestation the *Dharma's* very Wisdom, Amida as Infinite Light touches our hearts. Therefore, it is said to outshine all the suns and moons anywhere in the entire universe. This is to say that Amida as Universal Light never condemns or judges the darkness within a person's heart to reject or cast him out. For Amida as

All-embracing Life never forsakes, abandons or excludes any sentient being, especially those who are hopelessly riddled by their *karmic* evils and transgressions.

As such, each of the twelve characteristics of the *Dharma's* Wisdom Light becomes all the more significant and profound when understood in this celestial cosmic sense of "boundlessness" and "togetherness." This cosmic significance can be seen in one of Shinran Shonin's letters to one of his disciples as follows:

Now the matters concerning the Twelve Lights (of Amida) is noted variously. They can be basically compressed into Amida as Unimpeded Light. The reason why is because Unimpeded Light means Amida's Light is not obstructed nor affected by the various shameless things that people in this world do that are so miserable and wretched. Since its purpose is to save such persons (with impediments and obstructions,) it is called Unimpeded Light. [Letter to Yuishinbō dated October the 21st. (taken from Shinryu Umehara. *Shoshin Ge Kogi*. P. 76. (rkt trans.))]

This is why Shinran Shonin, in the second line of his *Shoshin Ge*, declared: "I take refuge in Immeasurable Light," (*Na-moh Fu-ka-shi-gi Ko* = Sacred Name in seven characters). These words were inspired by Vasubandhu's own declaration of faith and trust in Amida as the Pure, Clear Light of Wisdom as follows: "I take refuge in the Tathagata whose Light pervades the ten directions of the universe (*Ki-myo Jin'jip'-po Mu-ge Ko Nyo-rai* = Sacred Name in ten characters). In so declaring his trust in Amida as the Clear, Pure Light of *Dharma* Truth, Shinran took refuge in Amida Buddha's powers and virtues of Immeasurable Life: "I take refuge in its Immeasurable Life" (*Ki-myo mur-ryo-ju Nyo-rai*). The virtues and powers of this Light have been explained above as the "Twelve Lights."

(to be continued)

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What does it mean to be "saved" by Amida?

ANSWER: In that instant we "trust" and "take refuge" in Amida just as the *karma* riddled beings we are, in that very instant, our birth in the Pure Land becomes a certainty. According to Jodoshinshu teachings, "in that very moment," we are "grasped" and "embraced" by Amida, never to be abandoned or condemned until such time we enter his Pure Land. According to Yoshitaka Tamai *sensei*, this is exactly when a person begins feeling, "Ah, how grateful, how *arigatai*, for his birth to come in the Pure Land."

According to Rev. Tamai, the "life" that we assume in the Pure Land is one of pure, boundless light (*muryo-ko*). We then are blessed with immeasurable life (*muryo-ju*). In addition, says Rev. Tamai, we come to enjoy the six occult powers, such as the power to see and know one's own past as well as that of others. [See Yoshitaka Tamai. *Ichinyo*. pp. 15, 16]

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