



GASSHO

MAY
2010

Issue No:05-10

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



LIVING UNDER AMIDA'S LIGHT

(*Shoshin Ge*: lines 25-28 & 29-34)

rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Once again, let us review Pure Land Master *Shan'tao's* parable about a "White Path" of spirituality that connects our world full of physical problems and mental defilements (the Eastern bank) directly to the Land of Amida Buddha's Clear Wisdom and Pure Compassion (the Western Bank). A "fiery river of flames" is constantly surging up from the South whose origins are unknown. At the same time, there also is a "river of freezing water" cascading down from the North whose origins are also unknown. Both rivers of fire and water relentlessly inundate the White Path as they keep crashing into each other. As they implode into each other to produce plumes of scorching embers, scalding steam and freezing fog that keep obscuring the Path. This mixing of cinders, steam, mist and fog symbolizes man's "out of control" passions, greed and vanities constantly keep obscuring his conscience, or the White Path.

The churning embers, scalding steam, and freezing fog depict the nature of man's burning passions and self vanities that make him coldly indifferent to the plight of others. Therefore the Serenity, Safety and Bliss on "the other side" of the rivers of fire and water cannot be seen or realized by such a person whose mind is full of burning desires and cold greediness. This is because his heart is also besieged by blinding selfishness and cold disregard for others. The mixture of cinders, steam and fog rolling into each other represents this sorrowful state in man. Furthermore, man's hatreds and resentments also blot out the very sun of Wisdom shining from above. Nevertheless, the *Dharma* Sun of Wisdom's Light constantly breaks through the most darkest of clouds and the coldest of freezing fogs that obscures the White Path, or one's conscience darkened by greed, hatreds and vanities. This parable of *Shan'tao* also is telling us that the "six realms of transmigration" on our side and the Pure Land of Amida on the other side of the river are both fully within the very *Dharma* Universe itself (*Dharmadhatu*).

However, because of the constant billows of fiery embers, swirling steam and freezing fog, the White

MONTH'S THOUGHT



... This world that we take for granted and see is intellectually reconstructed; it is not the real one. We have re-formed it through our senses and our intellect working at the back of the senses. We reconstruct this world and believe that our fabrication is the real thing. ...

[D. T. Suzuki. *Buddha of Infinite Light*. p.39]



Path cannot be seen. This is to say that when mortals, are blinded by their raging passions and frozen in their foolish vanities, they are unable to "see" Amida, and, as of consequence, are unable to "visualize" his Pure Land within their "deepest conscienceness." As of consequence, this is why the Path is not visible to those who are living only through their senses on "the Eastern side of the Rivers of Fire and Water." This also is because there are bandits, predators and venomous creatures pursuing him. The Path, nevertheless, exists as an undeniable actuality in each person's "deepest conscienceness." The red hot cinders, scalding steam and freezing fog stand for the fabrications raging in our minds and the self vanities

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES for MAY 2010

1st SUN May 2nd:

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

2nd SUN May 9th:

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

3rd SUN May 16th:

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

4th SUN May 23rd:

Commemorating Shinran's Birthday

9 A.M. Eng. Service
Guest speaker:
Ms. Sandra Hiramatsu

5th SUN May 30th:

MONTHLY
FAMILY WORSHIP
9 a.m. Eng. Serv.
Dharma Talk
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

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With Deepest Sympathy

Yukie Morinaka 84yr March 20, 2010

in our hearts that render us cold and insensitive to the suffering of others.

The Path itself is a hundred strides long, four inches in width and five inches deep. The "four" indicates the "four basic elements of life:" air, water, fire and earth. The "five" indicates the "five sense organs" without which our anatomical being as a conscious person would not be a possibility. The White Path stands for Amida's Wisdom that is forever manifesting itself as Unconditional Compassion in the form of his Sacred Name that is indestructible like a diamond. This is why the Path is called the "Diamond-like Mind of Amida." It is Amida's "Mind of Unwavering Sincerity" full of Unconditional Compassion for all sentient beings that has never or will ever abandon them. The Sacred Name that is: *Namoh-amida-butsu*, which is the White Path connecting our world to the Pure Land. Therefore, the White Path in the parable is not incinerated by the river of fire, nor is it washed away by the river of water.

Shan'tao's parable then describes a "solitary naked traveler" on the Eastern side of the contra-flowing rivers of fire and water (the "six realms of transmigration" infected by mankind's greediness, hatreds, vanities, and arrogance). The "naked traveler" is trying to escape robber-bandits, predator beasts and venomous insects constantly pursuing him without rest. They represent all kinds of fellow human beings, circumstances and conditions constantly trying to devour his mind, body and spirit.

Suddenly, the "naked sojourner" comes to a desolate clearing surrounded by thickets and brambles. He enters this seemingly secluded safe clearing. However, he soon realizes that it is also full of weeds, thorns, prickly grass and choking vines. In the shadows of the thickets lurk other predators, creatures and venomous insects. The clearing is also a marsh full of quicksand and sink holes. So he bolts and continues to run for his dear life. This continues to be the case from one clearing after another. Furthermore, he hears the constant buzz of insects around him. This constant "buzzing" represents his own fears and uncertainties!

Shinran Shonin composed *Wasans of Self Lament* to describe this outer and inner predicament of the "naked traveler." In so reflecting, Shinran was referring to himself in the following paens:

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

... **Never abandoned:** these words teach us that the person of shinjin [true, real faith] is embraced and protected by the heart of the Buddha of wisdom-light and that he is never abandoned, but always resides within that heart of light. [SBT-Series. *Notes on Once-calling ...* [mine. p. 38]

One's ignorance full of
passions and vanities
grows thicker and thicker,
Numerous as dust particles
blowing everywhere!
To indulge or to abstain from life
becomes a problem.
The problems become higher
than the highest of mountains!

Because we are sentient beings
who are full of false views
We are like dense forests,
thickets, and brambles,
full of burrs and thorns.
As nembutsu followers
are disparaged and denigrated,
everywhere vitriol prevails!
Shozomatsu Wasan No. 8, 9
rkt translation.

Such was the world in which Shinran Shonin lived, a world plagued by greed, hatreds and unwarranted presumptions that inevitably end in conflicts and violence.

So, again and again, the naked traveler vaults out of his temporary haven to begin running for his dear life as the pursurers keep closing in on him. As he keeps fleeing, the naked traveler suddenly comes to the very edge of this "river of fire and water inundating the White Path." The dark plumes of cinders and ash, and freezing mists and fog endlessly keep imploding into each other to obscure the White Path. He is faced now with a life or death dilemma. For the freezing cascading water rolling down from the North and scorching fire billowing up from the South keep cascading and exploding into each other right before his own eyes. This makes it seemingly impossible to cross safely over to the "other side of the two rivers." He looks to the source of the icy water rolling down from the North. He sees no place where he can cross over it. He looks then to the source of the fire swirling up from the South. He also sees no point at which he can safely cross over to the Other Shore. As of consequence, the traveler thinks that there is no

possible way he can get over to the "other side of the rivers of fire and water."

In turning about he sees the bandits, predators, creatures and insects rapidly closing in on him. He, has nowhere to flee, whether it be forward, backward, to the right or to the left. Thus, suddenly feelings of despair and dread begin to overwhelm him. For now it is apparent that he cannot now escape death. Pure land Master Shan'tao, at this point, skillfully poses "three life or death questions." They are: "If I just stand here, I will die!" "If I try to go back I will die!" "If I try to swim the river of fire and water I will surely be incinerated or drown." "Oh, what am I to do now?"

Master Shan'tao, at this decisive moment, introduces the "voiceless voices" of Sakyamuni Buddha on "this side" and Amida Buddha on the "other side" of the rivers of fire and water. A "voiceless voice" behind him urges him to cross the Path "at once." At the same time another "voiceless voice" from across the river tells him also to instantly step on the White Path and walk over to the safety of the "Other Shore." These "voices" of Sakyamuni and Amida are one and the same voice that is "*Namoh-Amida-Butsu*" itself. It is the voice full of Wisdom and Compassion resounding throughout the universe.

The reason why these "voices" are "voiceless" is because Sakyamuni Buddha is no longer living amongst us. So the "voice" of Sakyamuni represents his "teachings" concerning Amida Buddha's Sacred Name. The "voice" from "the other side of the river" is also "voiceless" because it is the very Sacred Name of Amida itself that has, and yet is and yet will be eternally calling out to all of us as *Namoh-Amida-Butsu* from deep within our "deepest consciousness." This "voice" of Amida is "the SOUND not made by two sticks rubbing or striking against each other." Amida Buddha's "voice," therefore, is not the voice made by one's larynx. It is the SOUND of the Dharma's Truth and Reality that are beyond words and concepts. Therefore, by our "hearing," "listening" and "responding" to *Namoh Amida Butsu* our "awakening of faith" occurs. It is not our "saying" or "recitations" or "chanting" of *Namoh-Amida Butsu* that we come to have faith and take refuge in Amida!

So the "voiceless voice" of Sakyamuni Buddha urging us to trust in the "voiceless voice" of Amida that is constantly calling out to us is the SOUND resounding in our "conscienceness" telling us to step on and begin walking the White Path between the rivers of fire and water over to the safety and security of the Pure Land without further delay. *Namoh-Amida-Butsu*, therefore, is the "voiceless voice" of Amida that mysteriously, upon our stepping on the White Path, becomes the very *Namoh-Amida-Butsu* that we our selves begin to utter. For *Namoh-Amida-Butsu* then become our very utterances of gratitude, reverence and profound

penitence. To walk the Path is to be touched, grasped and embraced by the Light of Wisdom and Life of Compassion that never ever condemn or abandon those who have taken refuge in Amida. Such a person's utterances of *Namoh-Amida-Butsu*, therefore, are not petitions or supplications on his part. They are not prayers for some kind of divine dispensation or a personal miracle! After stepping on the White Path, such a person's mind, heart and very being, instead, become permeated with Amida's Great Heart of Compassion that has never or will ever forsake or reject him." The voice behind the "naked person" on "this Eastern bank," therefore, is the very voice or Sakyamuni Buddha to be found in his teachings urging us all to step on the White Path without any delay before it's too late. The voice from the other side of the two rivers is the voice of Amida resounding in our deepest selves inviting us all to come on over to the safe haven of his Pure Land.

The perplexed "naked person," however, still fearful and doubtful yells: "The Path is too narrow! How can I not slip and fall into either the fire or the water? If I fall in the fire, I will be incinerated. If I fall into the water I will be frozen to death! How is it possible for me to walk through such burning fires and freezing waters? I do not even know how to swim such a river of fire and water!"

Then the "voiceless voice" of Sakyamuni Buddha says: "Just step on the White Path and begin walking it until you get to the other side of the two rivers of fire and water!" At the same time, the "voiceless voice" of Amida Buddha calls out: "Just trust in the White Path that I myself have made just for you to cross. "Have no fear of slipping into either river of fire or water, for I will not allow the fire to incinerate you or the waters to drown you. Fear not the churning embers or swirling mists, for I will have you in the firm grasp of my two hands, the hand of sure Wisdom and the hand of unfailing Compassion. So, take refuge in my powers of Wisdom and virtues of Compassion. Get immediately on the White Path that is my Sacred Name now right before your feet!"

Upon hearing these "voiceless voices" the naked traveler becomes full of trust and assurance. He follows Sakyamuni Buddha's instructions and keeps steadfastly "listening" to Amida Buddha's beckonings. He then takes that most crucial "leap of faith" by "stepping" on the White Path (life of *nembutsu*) and single-mindedly begins walking the White Path. That he will finally step on the "Western side of the river," this now becomes settled!" For by getting on the White Path, according to Shinran Shonin, such a person, becomes a person of "faith," a person firmly established in the "Rightly Settled State." Such a person has become a person of gratitude and penitence never to be rejected or condemned by Amida!

This is why Shinran said:

In the person of nembutsu opens up the great path of unobstructed freedom. The reason is that the gods of heaven and earth bow before the practitioner of true entrusting, and those of the world of demons and rival paths cannot obstruct his way. The consequences of karmic evil cannot bear fruit, nor does any form of good equal his. Thus, it is called the great path of unobstructed freedom. [T. Unno. *Tannisho*. VII p. 12]

Thus, the person who has stepped on the White Path begins walking "the great path of unobstructed freedom." Though the waves of scorching fire and freezing water keep lapping at his feet, he keeps walking the White Path without looking back. However, he keeps hearing the clamor of voices yelling at him, "You will never make it. You'll be either incinerated or drown. Turn around, come back!" Because he is now firmly embraced by Amida, he is not affected by the effects of the scalding fire or the freezing waters, that continue to lap on his feet. Nor do the voices of the bandits and robbers unsettle him any more! Nor does the person wobble or stumble when the waves of fire and water come crashing down on him! His heart becomes all the more steadfast and full of gratitude and serenity for the grasp of Amida becomes even firmer as the turbulence gets greater. For now he realizes that all the while Amida has never or will ever forsake or abandon him. Until he steps on the "Other Bank" he now knows with certainty that Amida will never leave his side until he, gets to the "Other Shore!"

These meanings are the meaning of the words: "karmic evil cannot bear fruit (for One's karmic evils are overcome only through Amida's Wisdom Power and by her unflinching virtues of Compassion and nothing else). This, however, does not mean that a person living the life of Nembutsu is not affected by feelings of anger, resentments or hate, for he is still a mere mortal, a sentient being subject to the karmic effects of his blind passions and stubborn self vanities to the very last breath of his life. This is why the White Path is depicted as being a 100 strides long, the natural life span which is about a 100 years. A person walking the Path of nembutsu does not react negatively to words of abuse and acts of hate directed at him. Though he may have to bear their pain and anguish whether inflicted by others or self inflicted, he bears them by virtue of Amida's Compassion! For such abuse and mistreatment, instead, serve as mirrors to reveal his own inner failings and shortcomings for his further inner self-reflections that transform "life's bitterness" into "life's mellowness."!

Let us now briefly turn to the lines 25-28 and 29-34 in the *Shoshin Ge*:

SHINRAN'S WASAN

In the radiance of the Buddha
of unhindered Light,
Found are the Lights
of Purity, Joy and Wisdom!
Their virtues inconceivably
benefit sentient beings
of the ten quarters!
Jodo Wasan 57
rkt trans.

If a single thought of
gratitude is awakened in us,
we shall realize Nirvana
without severing
our blind passions.
When ordinary people, sages
as well as those who commit
the gravest offenses
and abuse the Dharma
are taken into the Vow.
They become one
in spiritual attainment,
just as the many rivers
become of one taste
upon entering the sea.

[Hisao Inagaki. *The Way
of Nembutsu* p. 33]

The Light of All-embracing Compassion
always illumines and protects us;
The darkness of ignorance
has already been destroyed by it.
But still the clouds
and mists of greed,
desire and enmity
Continually cover the sky
of True Faith;
Because the sun, though blanketed
by clouds, mists and fog,
Yet, because of this Light,
the darkness below continues
to be fully illuminated!

[H. Inagaki. *loc. cite.*, p. 45]

Let us then relate the above verses of the *Shoshin Ge* to Shan'tao's parable of the White Path and Two Rivers.

These verses describe the dilemma of us who have been born on "this side of the river" subject to ceaseless births and death, a world full of defilements, deceptions, greed, hatreds and self vanities. This is the plight of the naked traveler. Upon reaching the Pure Land, such a person then will finally realize that both the "Eastern side of the river" and the "Western

side of the river" are both fully within the very same Cosmos of Boundless *Dharma*. This means that the *Dharma's* Wisdom shines without prejudice on all things and forms of life throughout the "ten endless directions and boundless regions of the universe" with its Compassion that embraces all things and all beings without any rejections or condemnations. This actuality is likened to the sun penetrating through the dark storm clouds below it to equally illuminate both sides of the rivers of fire and water without discriminations, prejudice and favoritism. Such then, is the Dharma's Wisdom's Clarity and Compassion's Purity.

Man's sight cannot see this universal source of All-pervading Light because mere mortal eyesight cannot penetrate through the storm clouds above to see the bright Sun of Wisdom itself above them. Because of the cinders, steam, and fog constantly obscuring the White Path before one's very eyes, we as mere mortals cannot see it either. For these reasons man cannot see the Dharma Sun constantly beaming down equally over the "other side" as well on "this side" of the rivers of fire and water. Because of the constant explosions of selfishness and resentments in himself, man does not hear Amida's Sacred Name, the SOUND not made by two sticks rubbing or striking against each other in his deepest self. That is, until he finally comes to the end of his rope and comes to take that crucial "leap of faith" by stepping on the White Path that connects his side of the river to the Other Side of Amida's Pure Land.

In a strange way, the steps we need to take on the White Path are the very same "seven steps" that were taken and retraced by Infant Buddha as soon as he was born out of the right side of his mother at the level of her heart and not down through the pelvic region of her person between her thighs.

[to be continued]

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

Being Overzealous

There was a young man named Srona who was born in a wealthy family but was of delicate health. He was very earnest to gain Enlightenment and became a disciple of the Blessed One. On the path to Enlightenment, he tried so hard that finally his feet bled.

The Blessed One pitied him and said, "Srona my boy, did you ever study the harp at your home? You know that a harp does not make music if the strings are stretched too tight or too loose. It makes music only when the strings are stretched just right.

"The training for Enlightenment is just like adjusting the harp strings. You can not attain Enlightenment if you stretch the strings of your mind too loosely or too tightly. You must be considerate and act wisely." Srona found these words very profitable and finally gained what he sought. [Numata Foundation. *The Teaching of Buddha*. (eng/japanese) p. 340 & 342]

QUESTION ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: Why is Amida Buddha called *Oya-sama*?

ANSWER: In Japanese *Oya* means being both father and mother at the same time. In Jodoshinshu, Amida Buddha is worshipped as Parent who at the same time is the father of Wisdom and the mother of Compassion at the same time. For this reason, the love and understanding of our earthly parents cannot be equated to Amida's powers of Wisdom and virtues of Compassion that never fails us. Amida's Wisdom especially works to transform the arrogance of evil doers into the virtues of penitence and humility. Amida's Compassion forever awakens our awareness as to the sanctity and sacredness of all things, whether they are living or non-living. Amida is especially compared a mother's love for her child who has become wayward, the child in pain, torment and suffering.

...Continued from pg 2

Spring O'Higan 2010

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...To be continued next month.