



GASSHO

April
2011

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



CIRCLES, CIRCUMFERENCES, AND SPHERES

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Once again, the day to celebrate the birth of "Infant Buddha," has come. The infant was born on April the 8th as the son of King Suddhodana and his consort, Queen Maya-devi. Then, some three to four hundred years after Buddha's death, his chroniclers glorified his birth by saying that Maya-devi dreamt of a Bodhisattva on a "four-tusked" white elephant descending into her "womb" from the heavens. The ascetic Asita upon seeing the newborn infant, they said, prophesized that he would either become a Universal Monarch or a World Honored Buddha leading all of mankind into the World of Dharma.

The chroniclers also said that the Infant Buddha-to-be was born out of the right side of his mother at the level of her heart and not from down between her thighs out of her womb. They say he landed feet first on the earth as his mother was standing upright supported by a branch of a tree in the Garden of Lumbini. The Infant then took seven steps forward, turned around to retrace these very steps right back to where he first landed upright on his two feet.

This story of "Infant Buddha's birth" is not to be equated to the "immaculate conception" of Jesus as the only "Begotten Son of God" born of the Virgin Mary. For the Buddhist biographers acknowledge that Sakyamuni indeed was born of human parents.

So, some three or four centuries after Buddha's death, the Buddhist monks and biographers mythologized Infant Buddha's birth to revere his memory. Our focus and interest, therefore, will be on the symbolism of Infant Buddha's seven steps and why he retraced his steps back to the very spot where his first landed upright on his feet. I am interested in the meaning of the "six steps" he took forward to the very edge of this world of *samsara*, and especially the "spiritual" significance of his "seventh step" as representing a person's "leap of faith" into the Great Unknown Beyond (*Nirvana*).

MONTH'S THOUGHT



Jung regards the total potential of the individual's psyche as an entity. Jung describes the self as a circle, its center unknown to you. That center which is deep in the unconscious mind, is pushing you, your capacities and your instincts. It gradually wakes during the first part of your life and gradually goes to sleep again in later stages. This is going on in you, and you have no control over it. Joseph Campbell. *Pathways to Bliss*. p. 68.



The "seventh step" that the Infant Buddha took has a great spiritual significance for all of us because it represents the "leap of faith" that each of us needs to take if we are to become genuine human persons "aware" of the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness that links all things and forms of life into a harmonious whole that is the Reality of Togetherness. The Dharma's Truth of Selflessness enables us to see that all things are spiritual. The Dharma's Actuality of Togetherness makes us realize that everything is sacred. This then is the significance of the "seventh step" in which a person's "ordinary consciousness" becomes "transformed" into her/his "spiritual conscienceness." The "seventh step" of Infant Buddha, therefore,

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR APRIL 2011

1st SUN APR 3rd

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

"Infant Buddha's 7th Step!"

2nd SUN APR 10th

HAWAII BUDDHIST COUNCIL'S HANAMATSURI SERVICE

No services at SKM
Please attend HBC Service

3rd SUN APR 17th

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

4th SUN APR 24th

No Service

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

HAWAII EISA CHIMUGUKURU DAIKO

Mr. Van Shimabukuro

Wed/Thur 6.30-8.30

THANK YOU FOR
YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS!!

With Deepest Sympathy

Mr. Edward K. Inouye 73yr Feb. 17, 2011
Mr. Toshiyuki Nishimitsu 86yr March 10, 2011

N-O-T-I-C-E!!
Reverend Roland Tatsuguchi
will be off island from
April 21-28, 2011

represents the goal of Buddhism is to become a Buddha, which is to become Selflessness itself like when a drop of rain disappears into the vast ocean. In doing so, one is not destroyed. One becomes its very waters of Selflessness and currents of Togetherness.

Such a "transformation" happens when a person trusts and takes refuge in Amida Buddha's Sacred Name *Namoh-amida-butsu* with a mind of sincerity and a heart of purity. When a person trusts and takes refuge in Amida, such a person's "everyday consciousness" is transformed "instantly" into his/her "spiritual conscienceness." Therefore, Infant Buddha's "seventh step" foretold of his coming enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree at age 35 when he would become the Truly Enlightened Buddha. It also foretold of his leading all of mankind into the World of Dharma. Finally, it also foretold of his final peaceful passing into the Boundless Realms of Nirvana at age 80 when he would lay on his right side (the side of his heart) under the shade of two majestic Sala trees to take his last breath of life.

Now, after having stepped into the "seventh dimension," Infant Buddha, however, turned right around to step right back into this world of transmigration. When he returned to where he first landed on this earth, he, with a "bull's roar," declared that he would be the very one to lead all of mankind out of this world of endless births and deaths back to the World of Dharma full of Infinite Light and Immeasurable Life. This mythological depiction of Infant Buddha "exiting," then "re-entering" this world suggests that "this world of samsara" and "that world of Nirvana" are not two disconnected, separate distinct realities. It suggests that both the Dharma World of Selflessness and Togetherness and the world of "sentient beings" are one and inseparable!

The "first six steps," therefore, stand for the world limited to the six sense organs, especially the brain full of thoughts, feelings and cravings that trigger the very things a person says and does (*karma*) as rooted in his/her belly and genital appetites and yearnings of the heart. The thoughts and feelings of a person are also constantly being moved by his/her secret ambitions, hopes and fears and agendas that he/she harbors in his/her heart. Therefore, those who think of only what money can buy fail to see the Essence of the Buddha's Mind and Heart (*buss shin*) in the very things they crave, strive, compete and become passionately attached to.

WORDS OF SHINRAN

... "Self-power" characterizes those who have full confidence in themselves, trusting in their own hearts and minds, striving with their own powers, and relying on their own various roots of good. Shinran Shonin. *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling.* p. 44.

Therefore, trying to picture and explain the Ineffable Essence of the Dharma's Selflessness manifesting itself as Amida Buddha's Togetherness, this is like trying to draw a "Circle with a broken Circumference" (C w/brkn C) on the free flowing currents and waters of the Dharma Ocean which is an impossible thing to do. So also is trying to imagine a "Circle without Circumference" to stand for the Formless Dharma 's Selflessness unthinkable. That is, until that all important "leap of faith" into the Great Unknown Beyond has been taken. For instance, until you switch on the lights of a dark room of your ego, you cannot see what is actually in it. When you "switch on the Dharma's Light" you then will see and understand the meaning of the "Circle without a Circumference" and the "Circle with a Broken Circumference" enfolding all the "circles with a circumference of your egoism!"

This "graphic" of the Boundless Dharma as a "Circle without a Circumference" manifesting itself as Amida as a "Circle with a broken Circumference," these depictions are nothing more than geometric abstractions to help us understand that the Formless Dharma manifesting itself as Amida's All-embracing Compassion is without prejudice or favoritism and that all things and sentient beings are in their embrace. Good people and bad people are fully contained within these two concentric circles of Selflessness and Togetherness. The Dharma is depicted as "Circle without a Circumference" containing the "Circle with a Broken Circumference" that is Amida.

Each circle with a solid circumference stands for a person's "bag of skin" filled with blind passions foolish vanities, likes and dislikes, hopes and fears (*bombu* = ordinary mortal). Each "bag of skin," whether "good" or "evil," is enfolded by Amida, Buddha and the Dharma. Each person, therefore, is represented as a "circle with a circumference," a cocoon woven of "blind passions" and "foolish vanities, therefore, filled with the "snarls" of misconceptions and transgressions fully embraced by Amida's Life and Light and the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness.

Thus the basis for Amida's vows to embrace all sentient beings to never forsake or abandon any one of them. These Vows of Amida to never forsake or abandon any being arises from the Dharma's all-pervasive Selflessness that has embraced and continues

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to hold all things in a Togetherness that is most sacred and spiritual. This then is the significance that underlies the significance of the three "concentric circles" with a common center," which in the multi-dimensional perspective become three concentric spheres" revolving around a common vertical axis.

The outermost sphere without bounds being like unobstructed infinite space has no limits. This sphere is represented as the "Circle without a Circumference" (C w/o C). This "circumference-less circle" yet fully contains the "Circle with a broken Circumference" that yet embraces within it all existent "circles with circumferences," or all sentient beings, including us human beings. This "three-in-one" graphic brings, then, a profound meaning to the words "sentient beings and Dharma are one and of the same essence" (*ki hoo itta*), and "Buddha and man are two and yet one and of the same essence" (*butsu bon itta*).

Therefore, when the vertical axle from the center of a person's heart is extended beyond his head into the Zenith above, it becomes a conduit that fills a person with spiritual truths that are timeless. When it is extended from one's heart down through the pelvis and right through and beyond the earth to the Nadir below, it becomes a conduit up through which a person becomes infused with the things of the earth that is in the selfsame universe. Thus, the Expansive Dharma World (C w/o C) constantly illumines and suffuses our personhood with its Truth of Selflessness from above as it infuses our whole being from below with its Reality of Togetherness that contains this very earth itself. This is how our "everyday consciousness" is constantly being transformed by our "spiritual axial conscienceness." This then is the very significance of Infant Buddha's "seventh step" that stands for the universe of all Buddhas and their Pure lands, above, below, the sides and in every conceivable dimension all around this earth of ours.

Therefore, the outermost "Circle without a Circumference" represents the boundlessness and expansiveness of the Dharma itself that is beyond words, concepts and human comprehension. This is why it is impossible to verbalize or explain the Dharma in its Transcendent State or in its State of Fullness (*Tattva*) or in its State of Emptiness (*Sunya*). The second inner "Circle with a broken Circumference" represents Amida Buddha tirelessly manifesting the Dharma's very Selflessness in the form of Inconceivable Light (*Amitabha*) and its Togetherness as Immeasurable Life (*Amitabha*). Amida as the very manifestation of the Dharma embraces all sentient beings without rejection with its Infinite Light and its all permeating Immeasurable Life. Especially is this true for those who are hopelessly riddled by their past and ongoing karmic evils (see T. Unno. *Tannisho* III).

The third innermost "circle" (c w/ c) has a solid circumference that is "unbroken." This seamless circumference stands for the fact that life's very passions and burning vanities are found in both "evil persons" as well as "good persons." For, in truth, all human beings have thoughts that are good or bad according to the everchanging circumstances that they find themselves in. Thus, Shinran in awakening to his "fact" said, "... Under the influence of our karmic past we human beings will do anything. ... " (T. Unno. *loc. cite*. Chp. XIII). In other words, human beings are such that, given the conditions and situation that they find themselves in, can respond either positively or negatively. For they can choose to abide by the Five Precepts or give in to the sensory allurements or material seductions that constantly assail them.

Therefore, as long as a person is morally confused and spiritually ignorant, s/he is not capable of visualizing the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness as being the very manifestations of Amida's Infinite Wisdom full of Boundless Compassion that equally embraces the "good person" and more so the "evil person." There under the hub of the "wheel of transmigration" are the wild black boar groveling and wallowing in its own insatiable belly and genital appetites, a hissing asp spewing its venoms of ill will, hatred, and a prancing rooster loudly crowing of its self importance and superiority over others. When they erupt into our conscious lives, they get out of control. As of consequence, this undeniable hidden darker side to our persons that is most despicable can be known only by trusting and taking refuge in Amida's Selfless Light and All-embracing Life.

Fortunately, there under the hub at the very center of our hearts also sits a Buddha in profound compassionate meditation. This Buddha is unaffected by the antics of the boar, asp and rooster. This Buddha is our "vertical spiritual conscienceness" the spot that intersects with our "horizontal sensory consciousness." This Buddha in us is a direct manifestation of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness appearing as Amida's pity, remorse and compassion. This Buddha in us connects us to the Dharma's timeless liberating truths constantly converging down into our "heart of hearts" from above while it infuses to permeate our lives from below with things that are eternally sacred. In this way, our vanities and arrogance become "transformed" into our humility and penitence and heartfelt expressions of gratitude.

This Buddha, therefore, is also the "voiceless voice" of Amida tirelessly calling out to us from every conceivable direction of the universe, from above, below, the sides and all around us as it comes together in our hearts as *Namoh-amida-butsu*. The Buddha in the very center of our heart of hearts, therefore, is where all the myriad Buddhas also appear from the

“ten endless regions and directions of the universe” to laud and praise this “voiceless voice” of Amida forever calling out to us in our deepest consciousness. This means that all the Buddhas are also urging us to trust and take absolute refuge in this “voiceless voice” of Amida with gratitude, reverence, humility and penitence, or with what is *shinjitsu shinjin*, a heart of deep faith that is sincere, true and real. This “voiceless voice” then becomes the six syllables *Na-moh A-mi-da Butsu* which is easy for us to utter and repeat. For this reason, all Buddhas laud and praise this name of Amida.

Namoh-amida-butsu manifesting the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness, therefore, is not the monopoly of any one person, race, creed, culture or religion. Neither is it peculiar to a specific historical era, or a special geographical site. This is the reason why the Dharma is “envisioned” as a Boundless, Expansive Sphere that is the universe embracing all that exists in every conceivable direction. Such visualizations should then help us to contemplate and visualize the Universe of Dharma, the All-embracing Buddhas and the Sangha of all sentient beings in terms of three concentric spheres as being of the very waters and currents of Selflessness and Togetherness freely flowing throughout them all. Such then is the significance of the phrases “three and yet one,” and “one and yet three!”

Such is also the significance of Amida as being the direct manifestation of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness embracing all sentient beings. This “voiceless voice” in one's heart is Amida's Sacred Name: *Namoh-amida-butsu*. Voicing this Name of Amida fills us, as mentioned, with humility and penitence, for it brings us a “peace of mind” and a “heart of tranquility” free of all fears, doubts and anxieties of being rejected and abandoned. Such a “voiceless voice” emerges of its “own accord from the very depths of our being where Amida sits unperturbed. This “voice” does not come from the negative karmic doings of the boar (selfishness), asp (bitterness) and rooster (vanities). It is the “Voiceless voice” of Selflessness and Togetherness!

Now one's ego cocoon, or “c w/ c,” is full of misperceptions, misunderstandings and, therefore, full of dark shadows cast by one's own assumptions and presumptions. They are like illusions and delusions without any substance and basis (like the “knots” on a rope when untied, does not destroy the rope itself). Likewise, we human beings, in actuality, are full of “knotted” misperceptions and misunderstandings much like the “knots” on a rope that shouldn't have been “tied” there in the first place. This is exactly why we have, are, and yet continue to be embraced “just as the “knotty” mortals we are” full of such “knots” that are being “untied” by the Dharma's Benevolent Selflessness and its All-embracing Togetherness that

SHINRAN'S WASAN

Experiencing Wisdom through nembutsu,
Is by power of Dharmakara's Vow
active and working on us!
Without this power of Wisdom working
to awaken faith in us,
how are we to realize Nirvana?

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 35.
rkt trans.

are full of Compassion that has, is, and yet keeps bringing us all to our final Buddhahood.

In 115 B.C. King Milinda (Menandros, one of Alexander's generals who became a Greek ruler of a province in India) questioned the Buddhist Sage Nagasena about how unreasonable and unthinkable it was to believe that an “evil person” could actually be saved by merely saying and repeating Amida's Sacred Name. Nagasena then replied:

A stone, however small, will sink into the water, but even a stone weighing hundreds of tons if put on a ship will float. (J. Takakusu. *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*. p. 166)

Now, such an “analogy” has to be carefully and deeply reflected upon if we are to grasp the undeniable fact that the “stone” is actually one's own self. We are like a “stone weighing hundreds of tons” on the “ship” called Amida's Compassion that has taken us on board. We are the “karma riddled beings” drowning in the ocean of ceaseless births and deaths. The further significance that the Great Ship of Amida is not only for human beings alone but for all sentient beings becomes clear! This is why Buddhism has been declared to be the first truly universal religion. This is because it includes even such things as “... plants, trees and the land.... This is why Buddhism is not an egocentric, ethnocentric, anthropocentric, and most clearly not a homocentric religion.

A homocentric religion is a religion that assumes that human beings are unique from the rest of creation because of their superior intellect and intelligence. Homocentrism basically means “man-centered.” This implies that human beings tend to project their own human qualities and ideas onto things, especially to an Omniscient Omnipotent Deity, as well as to the lesser gods and goddesses like Zeus and Venus and self-deified emperors and kings. A homocentric theology and cosmology implies that a Superior Intelligence created the Universe only for the sake and benefit of human beings. Buddhism teaches otherwise. The Universe was not created just for the sake of human beings. Man is not the center of the Universe but a beneficiary and participant in it. To project one's ego

and to impose man's egoism on things and others, this, Buddhism teaches, is an error.

This was why Shinran Shonin in his *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho* followed the lead of the Indian Sage Nagarjuna, who, in his *Commentary on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages*, said:

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. *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*. SBT-Series. Vol. I p. 79. Bold for emphasis.

In quoting these words of Master Nagarjuna, Shinran Shonin also likened the Primal Vow of Amida to a Great Vessel that "... **takes others across** ..." the ocean of endless births and deaths to the safety of the Other Shore full of Joy and Serenity. Amida, in other words, is a Buddha who especially grasps those who are sinking and drowning in the turbulent ocean waters and currents of births and deaths. By grasping and pulling them on board his ship called Great Compassion he is tireless in saving all beings without exceptions. Once pulled on board, Amida never lets anyone slip back into the turbulent ocean waves until they safely disembark on the safety solid ground of the "Other Shore."

In his Preface to his *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*, Shinran, therefore, wrote:

"I reflect in myself: The universal Vow difficult to fathom is indeed a great vessel **bearing us across the ocean difficult to cross**. The unhindered light is the sun of wisdom dispersing the darkness of our ignorance. ..." *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*. SBT-Series. Vol. I p. 57. Bold for emphasis.

Clearly, Shinran was not just thinking only of his own salvation. That he also was thinking of others is indicated by the "**us**" as seen in the phrase "... bearing **us** across the ocean difficult to cross." This is the significance also of the phrase, "... **takes others across** ... "

As of consequence, Shinran describes the power of Amida's Wisdom and her benevolent Compassion as not discriminating between "good people" (the sheep) from "bad people" (the goats) as follows:

In reflecting on the ocean of shinjin, 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 neither of 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. I p. 249, Bold for emphasis]

This is the reason for my depicting Amida as a "Circle with a broken Circumference" within a greater "Circle without a Circumference" both fully containing all "circles with a circumference," or all sentient beings without exclusions or rejections.

In this way, the inseparable relationship between the Dharma, the Buddhas and the Samgha of all sentient beings becomes clear and established. This inseparability is represented, therefore, as a "C w/o C" as radiating the Dharma's Light of Selflessness and Life of Togetherness constantly flowing into the "Circle w/ brkn C." This "C w/brkn C" stands for Amida's Wisdom and Compassion that keeps "shining" right through the hard shell of a person's ego illusions and delusions (c w/ c). This relationship is likened to the sun radiating "rays of light" right through the dark clouds below it to illuminate all that is below on earth. This power of Wisdom and virtues of Compassion penetrates to disperse the darkness in sentient beings with the Dharma's True Light of Selflessness and its Real Life of Togetherness in the form of Amida's "voiceless voice," full of commiseration and compassion.

According to Buddhism, the Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness are timelessly shining on all sentient beings without discrimination. Such a Truth and Reality (*shinjitsu*) cannot be adequately conceptualized even as I am attempting to do now. For the Ultimate Dharma can be "realized" only when one has taken that most crucial "leap of faith" into the Dharma Ocean which is to be "grasped" by Amida and "taken on board" his Great Ship of Boundless Compassion.

In taking such a "leap of faith," such a person instantly is embraced by Amida. This "leap of faith" awakens him to the further actuality that he cannot be truly happy as long as other things, creatures and others around us are unhappy and in disarray. This is because of the misunderstandings and conflicts that arise under such conditions that infect and affect not only one's own life but that of all others and innocent creatures and ecosystems as well. This is indicated by the "**us**" and "**others**" as mentioned above. This then is the meaning of interdependency, mutuality, reciprocity and Togetherness as uniformly governed by direct and indirect causes.

Therefore, Amida is constantly manifesting himself as his Sacred Name that is in full accord with the orderly laws of causality, conditionality, interdependency, especially in accord with each individual's karmic condition. For Amida does not intervene to contravene the effects and affects of a person's karma. Instead, Amida's Light and Life, like the rays of the sun turning green fruit into ripe ones, "transforms" man's ignorance into "enlightenment" (*ten' mei kai go*). This transformative process can be as gradual and meandering as a river returning to the sea. Or it can be sudden as a snowflake or a raindrop becoming the very waters and currents of the ocean in the very instant they fall into the sea.

Now, as long as our minds, bodies and spirits are turning in the counter clockwise rotation against the clockwise rotation of the Dharma's Selflessness, we will continue to be living our lives driven by our personal vanities, tribal loyalties, religious beliefs and ethnocentric convictions full of contradictions against the Dharma's Togetherness. This further means we are not truly in tune with other human beings because we see them to be different from us in racial, cultural and religious terms. Such distinctions become even more pronounced whenever one becomes blinded by the color of a person's skin, ethnicity, traditions and religion and perceive others as our adversaries or enemies.

To live for one's own "... survival, security, personal relationships, prestige, and self advancement. ...," this has been the history of man (see Joseph Campbell. *Pathways to Bliss*. p. 89). To be living selfishly with utter disregard of others is to be living like a brute beast, a hungry ghost and even like a heartless demon. Such persons are living in the counter clockwise rotation against the clockwise flow of the Dharma's True Light of Selflessness and Real Life Togetherness. As of consequence, such people mistake what is "false for true" and "true for false." This also means that as long as a person dwells in the darkness of his/her blind passions and self vanities, s/he will never "... arrive at the true" (*Dhammapada* No. 1),

In theocratic or homocentric religions, a person's physical person (flesh = carnality) is seen to be distinct and disconnected from one's soul (autonomous spirit). Biblically speaking, everyday life is based on sensuality and carnality, or the life of sin (the "goats"). Such people are to be cut off from the world of spirit (the "sheep"). The "body" and "soul" are seen to be adversaries, two conflicted entities, one to be defeated and the other to be victorious. This is like seeing the earth in the "dark of night" and in the "light of day" as if they were two different planets, one the world of "darkness" and the other the world of "light." Those who live on the dark side of the earth are seen as living in the worldly ways of sin possessed by demons. Those who live on the side of the earth in the full light of day

are seen as living in the world of righteousness protected by heaven's angels hovering over them. In this perception, "sinners" are to be annihilated while the "saints" are to inherit this earth once again, that is, after it has been purged and purified of all sin and evil.

Behavior modification is based on the principles of operant conditioning that are similarly predicated, if not, based on the same methods of rewarding good behaviors and punishing bad ones. For good reactions and responses that are to be established are concretely rewarded and verbally praised and affirmed. Undesirable reactions and responses that are to be "extinguished" are eliminated are not materially rewarded or verbally affirmed. Negative behaviors however, are not to be "eliminated" by "don'ts" or "punishments." Punishing negative responses and reactions only reinforces them. Such is the significance of "operant conditioning."

Therefore, it is to B.F. Skinner's credit that he came to realize that "punishing" negative behaviors in fact does not eliminate or "extinguish" them. Punishment, paradoxically, reinforces them all the more. Punishing bad behaviors may provoke negative responses that are even more devastating than the originally targeted ones that were to be eliminated. Freud also discovered that the "suppression" of desires and "repression" of instincts makes them even more potent. For when they do erupt they get out of control. Thus the meaning of "blind passions" and "foolish vanities."

The bright full moon in the night sky seen through the eyes is only a photo-image of the front half of the moon projected on the blackboard of one's mind. This is like drawing a circle and coloring it white on the blackboard then to sigh: "Oh how bright the full moon in the night sky!" This image then becomes but a mental imprint that sinks into one's subconsciousness. There, it becomes a forgotten image, a vague memory in one's subconscious and unconscious mind. Whenever recalled to conscious mind it returns as a "virtual image" that has no reality. Such an image recalled is not the actual moon that was up there in the prior night's sky.

Now, even the actual sighting of the full moon in the night sky does not reveal its hidden backside in the darkness of the night. This inability of the naked eye to see the backside of the moon demonstrates what are the limits to our sense organs through which our flawed conceptions are formed by the logical mind. Especially do these flaws become pronounced when our brains form logical and plausible explanations that have no basis or reality to them. Such is the significance of the "circle with a circumference," or our "bag of skin" full of illusions, delusions, passions and vanities that are full of imagined, fictional and arbitrary imaged

and notions. Like the eye unable to see into its own eye, the conscious mind likewise cannot see into its own brain, especially into its deepest unconscious being.

This limitation to our sense organs is further demonstrated when one looks at one's face reflected in the mirror on the wall. The face you touch on the mirror's surface is not your actual face. You are touching only a reflection of your face on the mirror. In fact, this face is like a "mask" because it is concealing your "inner face" that yet conceals your real self full of selfishness, resentments and vanities buried deep in your unconscious being. Your real self is buried so deep in your ego that you do not see it. The reason why this self riddled by ego is unseen is likened to the eyeballs unable to see into its own eyes. Thus it is difficult to see what's going on in one's subconscious mind and unconscious heart. Nor can one's hands grasp hold of our innermost thoughts, feelings, sentiments, emotions, desires, motives, etc. for our hands to take apart and see what they are actually made of.

In a similar way, this is also why it is most difficult for us to believe and trust in the Dharma's Selflessness by taking refuge in the Reality of its Togetherness. Jung, however, saw that human thoughts, feelings, desires and motives are passed on from generation to generation through what are our personal and collective unconscious, especially through what he calls the archetypes that connect our ancestral pasts to our personal present. This is how we, as we live in the present, are inseparably connected to countless unknown others in our past. The past in unseen ways, therefore, influences what we are thinking, feeling, saying and doing in our present lives. This is also how we, through our personal unconscious are connecting to the future generation of people yet to be born and yet to live.

Therefore the karmic effects and affects of what we are thinking, saying and doing in turn then come to effect and affect the thoughts, words and actions of others who are yet to be born in the future. In this way, the past, present and future become a seamless circle that is also a boundless sphere without boundaries in which all the karmic elements of the past, present and the future are constantly being linked according to the orderly principles laws of conditionality and interdependency as governed by invariable laws of causality and Karma. This seamlessly rotating circle is called "the twelve-divisioned chain of causation" that contains and encloses what are the "six realms of transmigration" that is also the "c w/ c."

This is why in our heart of hearts we must "visualize" all of existence and all forms of life as being eternally sacred and timelessly spiritual. For as long as our minds are all "knotted up" with the pretensions of race, ethnicity, creed, culture and religious exclusivism, we will never feel and experience the reality of a thing

or a person in terms of his/her personhood in the contexts of Selflessness and Togetherness or what is the life of "unobstructed freedom." For the critical, logical, rational, opinionated intellect keeps screening out the living elements of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness that harmonizes with the pulsations of sacredness and spirituality.

In Buddhism, each "circle of life" is seen to be inseparably linked to all other "circles of life" in a myriad of visible and invisible ways that have, are and yet linking and re-linking to all living and non-living things over a beginningless past, living present, and to an endlessly unfolding future ("The Golden Chain" – "Seamless Knot" – "Circle w/o C"). This, then, is the positive meaning to the terms *anitya* and *anatman*.

Now, when you point to the clouds above and beyond the blue of the skies into the endless unfathomable depths of the universe, you, in fact, are pointing to and looking at the one and same universe from wherever you may be on the face of this earth! For, the universe is an expansive, all-embracing sphere of unobstructed boundlessness that contains this earth and all else that is in it. Therefore, whenever your "heart of hearts" connects your "horizontal lines consciousness" to your "vertical spiritual axial conscienceness," your whole person begins soaring in the Expansive Dharma World that is "the great path of unobstructed freedom" (T. Unno. *Tannisho* VII. p.12).

To be so embraced by Dharma and grasped by Amida is to undergo an "awakening of faith" whereby the self riddled by blind passions and vanities (c w/ c) becomes permeated by a Wisdom and Compassion (C w/brkn C) that transforms our mindlessness into mindfulness and our impertinence into penitence, a penitence free of all doubts and fears of being rejected and abandoned. This is when the self becomes genuinely aware that even "... plants, trees and the land ..." are all permeated by a spirituality and sacredness that should not be desecrated or violated (see *Notes on 'Essentials ...'* p. 42. SBT-Series).

In his *River of Fire, River of Water* (p. 153), Taitetsu Unno presents Shinran's perspective concerning this centermost point around which the "C w/o C" and the "C w/brkn C" are revolving clockwise, while the "c w/ c" embraced by them is revolving in the counter clockwise rotation. Unno says:

Shinran refers to the center of a circle without a circumference (one's "vertical axial conscienceness") as *isshiji*, one-child-earth. This indicates that each (karma riddled) person is the primary concern of great compassion, just as an only child is the sole focus of parental love. ... () s mine.

Unno then quotes the words of Pure Land Master Genshin as follows:

The Buddha's regard for each sentient being with eyes of compassion is equal, as though each one were his only child; hence I take refuge in and worship **the unsurpassed mother of great compassion**. (*ibid.*, Bold for emphasis)

Unno then concludes his chapter on "*All is a Circle*" with the following words of Shinran Shonin:

When I ponder on the compassionate vow of Amida, established through five kalpas of profound thought, it was for myself, Shinran, alone. [*Tannisho. Epilogue*]

These words of Shinran indicate how the Dharma's Selflessness as Amida's All-embracing Compassion and Wisdom that had embraced him unconditionally to never ever forsake or abandon him.

In summary: All Life is One! All Life is Sacred! All Life is Spiritual! Human life is fully within the World of Dharma wherein Amida's Wisdom and her Compassion steadily keeps transforming a person's ingratitude into gratitude, and his irreverence into reverence. For this reason, Buddhism does not subscribe to any doctrine or creed that contradicts what are the orderly, uniform processes of causality, conditionality, interdependency, and most importantly, what are the consequences of a person's karma and his circumstances that are leading her/him to final Buddhahood.

In reality, we all are like green persimmons being turned into ripe persimmons by power and virtue of sunlight. Thus a Chinese Pure Land Master speaks of Amida's powers and virtues as Amida saying: "I can make bits of rubble turn into gold." According to Taitetsu Unno, such a metaphor of self transformation,

... is not ... a simple, naïve optimism for the starting point of Buddhism is a recognition of the universal fact of human suffering, born of both personal and collective karma. ... not merely on the surface of things but at its most profound depth. In this depth, abundant with the accumulated pain and sorrow of humanity, is also found the capacity of the human spirit to achieve its fullest potential, no matter the obstacles, through awakening to the working of boundless compassion deep within our life. T. Unno. *Shin Buddhism* ... p. 17

Indeed, in this life full of suffering, all things, nevertheless, are governed by the uniform and orderly laws of causation and conditionality characterized by impermanency (*anitya*) and non-substantiality (*anatman*). Thus, interdependency means everything

is undergoing process and therefore constantly changing.

I hope what I have tried to graphically depict the Boundless Dharma, Amida Buddha and sentient beings as three conchells you in some way to connect your "everyday consciousness" to your "spiritual conscienceness." You can make that most crucial "leap of faith." Making this "leap of faith" will awaken and transform your "ordinary consciousness" into your "spiritual conscienceness" like "bits of rubble being turned into gold." To be so transformed is to become a person of humility and penitence full of joy and gratitude, instead of a person sizzling with anger, resentment and bitterness, or a person of faith intimidated by doubts and fears of being rejected and adandoned by some kind of wrathful, vengeful deity.

BUDDHIST STORIES AND PASSAGES

One should always remember that nothing in the world can strictly be called "mine." What comes to a person comes to him because of a combination of causes and conditions; it can be kept by him only temporarily and, therefore, he must not use it selfishly or for unworthy purposes. BDK. *The Teaching of Buddha* (Japanese-English 1966) p.18

QUESTION AND ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What do you mean by "horizontal sensory consciousness" and "vertical spiritual conscienceness"?

ANSWER: By "horizontal consciousness" I mean experiencing "what's out there" through what you see, hear, taste, smell and touch that then is interpreted by your brain, which in turn triggers a natural reaction to what is pleasurable or painful, or a conscious response based on your "likes" and "dislikes." Blinking is a natural reaction. Choosing is a conscious response.

By "vertical conscience-ness" I mean when a person's consciousness becomes "aware" that there is sacredness and spirituality in everything. Such an "awareness" is like a light turned on in a pitch-black room. When the "light" is on, it does not incinerate to destroy the things in the room. In other words, when a "coil of rope" in the dark shadows mistaken for a "coiled venomous snake" is seen in full sunlight, seeing the "rope" as a "rope," this "seeing" does not destroy the rope, does it?

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