



# GASSHO

June  
2011

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*"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"*



## HOW MANY MORE SUNSETS REMAIN?

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

The industrial-military complex backed by Congress keeps developing more and even more devastating weapons of mass destruction. Our nation even before its Declaration of Independence in 1776 was already displacing and/or decimating Native American tribal Indian nations. Based on its expansionist policies passed by Congress and backed by military force, Native Americans were decimated or displaced by the hundreds at a time.

In 1832, twenty-two-year-old George W. Harkins, a half-white Choctaw Native American Indian, in his *"Farewell Letter to the American People,"* described how his native tribal people were forced off their lands in order to open them up to American settlers, frontiersmen, speculators and businessmen.

In his *"Trail of Tears"* Harkins tells of how his tribe of Cherokee American Indians were forced to walk hundreds of miles like a bunch of cattle to relocation sites that were harsh and less productive. Many were shot as they tried to escape. Many more, especially the elderly, the women and the children, due to the hardship, disease and mistreatment they had to endure, died. Many, who no longer could walk, were left to die on the wayside. Many, therefore, died of starvation or because of the diseases they had been exposed to. This policy of driving American Indians off their lands gained momentum with the Indian Removal Act of 1820 passed by Congress. As of consequence, further tribal lands were annexed and declared to be "trust territories" of the United States as our nation began pushing Westward even beyond into the Pacific Ocean.

In the short span of two centuries after July 4, 1776, the United States began annexing the lands of peoples in the Caribbean and Pacific oceans as Trust Territories of the United States, to compete with the Spanish and the British. The annexations involved some 2000-plus islands. For example, after the Spanish-American War, the Philippines, Santiago and San Juan and their islets were annexed in 1898. In that same year, on July 21st, Hawaii was annexed a Trust Territory

## MONTH'S THOUGHT



... Just to say "I believe," or "I do not doubt" will certainly not solve the problem. To force oneself to believe and to accept a thing without understanding is political, and not spiritual or intellectual. Walpola Rahula. *What the Buddha Taught*. p. 3.



of the United States. The Philippines and Hawaii were seen to be especially militarily strategic to the vital interests of the then expansionist policies of the United States based, albeit, on the professed goal of establishing a New World Order (*NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM*) as inspired by the ideals of democracy based on Judeo-Christian justifications.

Consequently, today, there are some 6,000 U.S. military bases in the U.S. and its territories and some 700 foreign bases all over the world. They are in places such as Japan, Okinawa, South Korea, Guam, Australia, New Zealand, Marshall Islands, Singapore, Thailand, Italy, Spain, Norway, Belgium, Greenland, Germany, Great Britain and so forth. The U.S. Navy itself has seven separate fleets of naval warships,

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# REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SERVICES for JUNE 2011

### 1st SUN JUN 5th:

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

### 2nd SUN JUN 12th:

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

### 3rd SUN JUN 19th:

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

### 4th SUN JUN 26th:

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

With Deepest Sympathy  
to the families of

Mr. Gary Makoto Kawaoka 68yr. March 20, 2011  
Mrs. Sumie Sasaki Miller 90yr. April 13, 2011  
Mr. Tetsuki Segawa 94yr. April 20, 2011

## 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!!**

### **BON DANCE REMINDER:**

Practice: July 12, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM  
Dance Nights: July 15 & 16, 7:30 PM - 10:30 PM  
Shinshu Kyokai Mission Parking Lot

aircraft carriers and nuclear powered submarines patrolling and controlling the seven strategic ocean areas of the world. One is the Mediterranean Sea and the other is the Persian Gulf, where a complete fleet of ships operates out of the Bahrain islands. There are also U.S. Air Force bases strategically established all over the world in the lands of our allies.

The United States now boasts of and has the most expensive and powerful military in the world. Even before 1776 the United States has been involved in some kind of war in one way or another, either overtly or covertly. Since 9/11 U.S. military involvement continues to take on even more ominous dimensions, especially now because of their increased nuclear capabilities. Chemical and biological warfare have also taken on even more sinister ramifications since their deployment can now be triggered electronically and robotically manipulated from a far off distance.

Paleontologists and anthropologists believe man first began walking upright some ten to four million years ago. To fight and defend themselves, human beings most probably then had to use their "hands" and "fists!" Then, they began to use "sticks" and "stones." Then, man learned how to shape knives and spear points out of bone and flintstone as well by fashioning bows and arrows out of wood. Then, in discovering metals like copper, tin, iron and so forth, he began to forge metal swords, then guns and cannons with the discovery of gunpowder. Then, before and after the Civil War (1861-1865), man engaged in arm to arm combat and began fighting not only on foot but also on horseback. Then in WWI (1914-1918), war became global, and man began using long-range cannon fire, armored tanks, fighter aircraft, anti-aircraft guns, chemical and biological weapons. Then in WWII (1939-1945) that ended with the atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the prospects of man's nuclear self-extinction came to cast an ominous cloud over mankind's future survival.

Ever since 9/11, things have become even more uncertain, for mankind has become involved in the ever escalating development of sophisticated weapons of warfare that are becoming even more deadlier than the former ones. Since WWII, our nation has been involved in several wars like the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975), and after, the Gulf Wars. We are still involved with the war in Afghanistan that the Russians began in 1979 that was

## WORDS OF SHINRAN

I Shinran, have never invoked the Nembutsu even once out of feelings of filial piety towards my parents. All sentient beings have been and will be, at one time or another, fathers, or mothers, brothers or sisters, in the course of our [samsaric] rebirths. .... Ryukyo Fujimoto. *Shin Buddhism's Essence: The Tannisho.* p. 17.

surreptitiously backed by the U.S. For the first time in man's history, the war in Afghanistan has become a war waged through faceless methods of mass destruction controlled completely by long-distance electronic and robotic devices. After WWII, Albert Einstein (1879-1955) worked hard to avoid WWII. He at the time said: "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

In the history of the United States only five wars have been sanctioned by Congress. The war declared by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on Japan after its Imperial Navy bombed Pearl Harbor was one of them. Since then, the wars engaged in by the United States were engaged in without Congressional approval. The Viet Nam war was not a war sanctioned by Congress. After 9/11 it seems we have not learned from the mistakes and horrors of the Viet Nam War. The carnage and shedding of blood continues. It may surprise you to learn that up to 80% to 90% of casualties in wars have been innocent civilians. The military casually and cavalierly refers to them as "collateral damage."

In reacting to the follies, atrocities and irrationality of all wars, Bob Dylan (Robert Allan Zimmerman) composed the lyrics to his "*Blowing in the Wind*" as follows:

How many Roads must  
a man walk down  
before they call him a man?  
How many seas must  
the white dove sail before  
she sleeps in the sand?  
Yes an' how may times must  
the cannon balls fly before  
they're forever banned?

The answer my friend,  
is blowing in the wind,  
the answer is  
blowing in the wind!

How many years can  
a mountain exist before

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it's washed to the sea?  
Yes an' how years can  
a people exist before  
they're allowed to be free?  
Yes an' how many times must  
a man turn his head  
and pretend that  
he just doesn't see?

The answer my friend,  
is blowing in the wind,  
the answer is  
blowing in the wind!

How may times must  
a man look up before  
he can see the sky?  
Yes an' how many ears must  
one man have before  
he can hear people cry?  
Yes an' how deaths  
will it take until he knows  
that too many people  
have died?

The answer my friend,  
is blowing in the wind,  
the answer is  
blowing in the wind!

These lyrics bring clarity to the fact that "the more things change, the more things remain the same!" The song also confirms the fact that "the most rational thing you can say about human behavior is that it is irrational," especially as concerning the aftermath of war and its long lasting effects. The former statement was made by Seymour Sarason, an American educationist. The latter was by Erik Ericksen, a sociologist whose specialty is urban ecology and behavior. The term "irrational" summarizes especially well those most horrifying of inhumane behaviors that are daily being reported in the most graphic of terms through mass media.

Unfortunately, humankind over the passing generations continues to undermine and defy the orderly and uniform processes of causation and karma. Through their excessiveness and wastefulness they keep defying the Truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness. This proclivity in human beings to be blatant and presumptuous continues to bring about dire consequences such as the extinction of species, degradation of surroundings, as well as conflicts and violence that continue to plague each generation.

According to the facts of karma, what people are presently thinking, feeling, saying and doing are being influenced and affected by what people in the past have already thought, felt, said and done. This karmic actuality is verified by Shinran Shonin as follows:

"... Know that every act done — even as slight as a particle on the tip of strand of rabbit's fur or sheep's wool — has its cause in past karma."  
SBT-Series. *A Record in Lament of Divergences*. p.33.

What these words also mean is that what people in the present are thinking, feeling, saying and doing invariably continue to be effected and affected on what people in the past have thought, felt, said and have done. What we in the present are thinking, saying and doing in turn will subsequently affect the lives of those who are yet to be born in the endless future. The positive meaning of karma then is to be found in changing what we ourselves living in the ever-changing present are thinking, feeling, intending, saying and doing by living a life based on the Eightfold Path. To do so is to correct the mistakes that were made in the past by focusing and improving on what can be changed and enhanced for the betterment and well-being of future generations.

This means then that each of us needs to understand how, what and why we are thinking, feeling, saying and doing the very things we are thinking, saying, and doing in the present. Then it is for us to see how what we are thinking, feeling, saying and doing will be effecting and affecting what people yet to be born in the future will be thinking, saying and doing. This means that we in the present have to be responsible and accountable for whatever we are constantly thinking, saying, doing, especially for the consequences of what we have thought, felt, said and done.

Shinran Shonin understood that this sense of "awareness" can only be found by trusting and taking refuge in Amida's Mind of Selflessness and her Heart of Togetherness that empowers us to be responsible and accountable for our thoughts, words, and actions. Such an empowerment "transforms" us. What this means is that such an "awareness" can be "awakened" only after we have entrusted our karma riddled beings to Amida the direct manifestation of the Dharma's Light of Selflessness and Life of Togetherness. Only then can we become truly "awake" of our karma riddled self that has, is and continues to be embraced by Amida who has never rejected or abandoned us.

For this reason, Shinran cautioned us:

... on the one hand, you should not be anxious that Tathagata will not receive you because you do wrong. A foolish being is by nature possessed of blind passion, so you must recognize yourself as a being of karmic evil. On the other hand, you should not think that you deserve to be born into the true and real Buddha Land through such self-power calculation. ... SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 2. p. 23.

What this means is that a "... person of the Jodo tradition attains birth in the Buddha Land by becoming



his foolish self." (*loc. cite.*, No. 6. p. 31). This reality is most difficult to become.

Nothing in this life remains the same and yet the underlying patterns of human behavior repeat themselves over the passing generations like seeds becoming fruits and these fruits in turn producing the next generation of seeds that then produce the next generation of fruits that contain the seeds of future fruits endlessly. This is why the mangos of last year are not the mangos of this year, nor are they the mangoes of each subsequent year, although they come from the same mango tree. This metaphor for repetitive births and deaths means that something cannot come out of nothing and that something that "seemingly" disappears does not become a "no-thingness." This Buddhist understanding of life and death accords with the understanding principle of physics that "matter is neither created or destroyed" but keeps changing in its forms, shapes and states.

Thus, the metaphor of raindrops falling into the sea that keep reappearing as refreshing drops of morning dew means that a person, likewise, upon death is not obliterated or destroyed or has become a "no-thingness." Buddhism often is accused of being a nihilistic philosophy and a pessimistic psychology of negativism. These accusations are not warranted, for the obliteration or negation of self into "nothingness" is not the real meaning of *sunya* or *sunyata* ("emptiness) or *anatman* ("no-permanent, unchanging eternal self"). The meaning is that upon death, one becomes like a "raindrop" that has fallen into the vast ocean to become at oneness (*ichinyo*) with the very waters and currents of the Dharma Ocean ("fullness" = *tattva* = Togetherness). In so doing, one's life is not destroyed or obliterated though its former form and shape are no longer visible. Trying to scoop a raindrop out of the ocean is like trying to grasp and retrieve a specific raindrop that has fallen into the sea.

Such a "transformative process" can also be likened to a migratory water bird sleeping with its head under its wing in the shallows of a lake standing on one leg while the other leg is bent and resting on it. Upon being "awakened" by the early dawn's light, it slips quietly out of the lake without making a sound or even the slightest of ripples. In doing so it avoids disturbing or muddying the waters as it leaves. Then high into the sky it flies. It begins then soaring with the winds to effortlessly glide and ride the air currents that carry it in the westerly direction, or its Western Home of Homes called the PureLand in Shin Buddhism.

As the dawning sun passes the midday point, it begins descending toward the western horizon. As the sun begins to set, the western skies begin radiating in hues of golden crimson oranges and purple pinks. The horizon turns into a fiery golden red-orange. The migratory bird like a person on a spiritual journey then

## SHINRAN'S WASAN

Those uttering Amida's Name  
as supplicatory prayer,  
They have not trusted  
and taken refuge in  
the Tathagata's Primal Vow.  
In so supplicating commit  
serious transgressions!  
For they will be born  
in the "womb palace" of  
the "seven jewels!"

*Shozomatsu Wasan* No. 65  
rkt trans.

descends down into another lake below. Once again like a spiritual pilgrim on a spiritual journey staying overnight in a wayside inn, the bird slips into the wayside lake without making a ripple or a sound to avoid disturbing or muddying the waters of life that support all the things and life forms in it including himself.

As the night sets in, the bird, once again, standing on one leg with the other resting on it, goes to sleep with its head tucked under wing as the stars above twinkle and keep winking at him throughout the night. Then, at the crack of dawn, once again, it ascends without making a ripple or muddying the waters into the sky to continue following the lead of the sun steadfastly in the westerly direction. This process of waking at sunrise, soaring and gliding with the winds during the day, then descending into a lake along the way to go to sleep at sunset, this repetitive process goes on until the migratory bird must finally follow the sun over the western horizon into the Great Unknown Beyond to be finally enfolded by the very radiance of golden red-oranges and purple pinks to disappear like a raindrop that has fallen into the ocean to become its very waters and currents.

So too will the final sunset to our lives be when we breathe our last breath of life. In doing so, we become one with the free flowing currents of Selflessness and boundless waters of Togetherness that is the World of Dharma that is Timeless Light and Immeasurable Life, or what is the Great Unknown Beyond that awaits us all with our final sunset of life. Like the migratory bird following the lead of the sun into its final sunset of life, we too, upon taking our final breath of life will enter the boundless Golden Radiance of Selflessness and Crimson Brilliance of Togetherness that is the Pure Land of Amida, our final Home of Homes where all are welcome. Once again, one's spiritual migratory journey can be compared to a "green persimmon" becoming a "ripe persimmon." The finality to our lives will be like a "raindrop" that enters the sea

to become its very waters and currents like a "green persimmon" that has finally become a "ripe persimmon!"

Such then is the significance of uttering and reciting the six syllables of Amida's Sacred Name: **Namoh A-mi-da Butsu!** *Namoh* is our selves riddled by illusions of ego and delusions of self importance as represented by the antics of the wild black boar, the venomous asp and the crowing prancing rooster under the hub of the wheel of transmigration that is our heart. Fortunately, under the hub there also resides *Amida Butsu* in the very center of our heart. *A-mi-da Butsu* is the "centermost still point" in our "heart of hearts," the very "nexus" where our consciousness and conscienceness coincide and are one. There in this nexus, Amida is the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness that has never nor will they ever forsake or abandon any sentient being, especially the likes of us who are hopelessly riddled through and through by the cumulative consequences of our past karmic evils.

Such is the profound Togetherness that is the inseparability between the Dharma, Amida Buddha and sentient beings. Such then is the Buddhist vision of Oneness (*ichinyo*). Such a Selflessness and Togetherness is beyond human understanding and comprehension. This is like trying to draw a "Circle without a Circumference," or a "Circle with a broken Circumference," or even a "circle with a circumference" on the free flowing waters and currents of the Dharma Ocean, which, of course, is an impossibility both graphically or conceptually or even physically, such as trying to scoop out dewdrops from the ocean.

Therefore, the lyrics to Bob Dylan's "*Blowing in the Wind*," in my mind, ask us as to how many sunrises and sunsets we ourselves have to go through before we can finally become truly understanding and genuinely compassionate in our thoughts, sentiments, words and actions. The joys, fears and ordeals that human beings go through and have to endure are represented by the repetitive sunrises of hope and sunsets of despair in which we human beings during daylight hours mindlessly and willfully say and do all kinds of willful things. Then at night, as we are sleeping, we are assailed by the consequences of what we have thought, felt, said and done in our dreams, if not in our nightmares.

These meanderings of one's consciousness during the "light of day" and befuddling images in one's unconsciousness in the "dark of night" are all represented by the "six realms of transmigration." The upper three realms are the direct opposites of the lower three realms. For example the realm of gods (heavenly existence or ecstasy and euphoria) can suddenly turn in the realm of demons (unbearable anguish and torment). Therefore, Dylan in his song, as I see it, is really pondering the dilemma and quandary each generation

has, is and yet continues to experience as each person keeps repeating the same karmic mistakes (habits and addictions). Everyone is pained by the repetitive habits, transgressions, illusions and delusions of men that keep defying and desecrating the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness. This is why "the more things change, the more they remain the same," and why "the most rational thing you can say about human behavior is that it is irrational because life is full of painful contradictions and the most befuddling of paradoxes." Indeed, "Life is full of suffering!"

Man's failings, especially his willful transgressions, these are due to his moral turpitude and his underlying ignorance of things sacred and spiritual (*avidya*). Because man is unaware of the Dharma's Selflessness he keeps desecrating its Togetherness that holds all things together in a sacred spiritual relationship. Though he knows better, man keeps defying and transgressing what are the facts of causality, conditionality, interdependence and especially what are the consequences of karma, both individually and collectively. This is why man persists in the harmful thoughts and feelings of ill will as he, as of consequence, says and does things that are hurtful and devastating. This is why human beings basically are no different from their animal cousins who feed upon other lives and things in order to live and survive. Only worse, man keeps devastating the lives of his fellow human beings, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. All three behavioral dimensions have karmic consequences in their interactive dimensions of mind, body, and spirit that are karma based.

Now, I would like share some of the lyrics to a *karaoke* song entitled *Haha wa Shinobu* (In Fondly Recalling Memories of My Mom). They are:

*Nozome domo  
atawa-nu inochi,  
Noza-masu tomo  
atae-rarue inochi!*

Which translates as:

Yearning for life  
and yet not obtaining it;  
Not yearning for life  
and yet obtaining and blessed by it!

The other being:

*Hito wa hadaka de kono yo'  
ni uma-re, naki, wari, okori,  
Hito wa mata hadaka de to  
ano yo' e futa-tabu  
tabi-dat'te yuku!*

These words translate as:

People are born into this world  
naked and without a thing;  
Then they cry, laugh and get angry;  
Then once again, without a thing,  
completely naked again they enter  
the Great Unknown Beyond  
to continue their upward journey!

These lyrics bring to the very fore of our consciousness the significance of Rennyo Shonin's *Hakkotsu no Gobunsho* (The Whitish Grey of Bones and Ashes). This Epistle basically tells us of the "ever fleeting nature" to our lives." Life passes us by like a "flash of lightning," full of uncertainties and unpredictability. This is why, says Rennyo, we must trust in the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness by taking refuge in its Reality of Togetherness.

To trust in the Dharma is to take refuge in Amida Buddha whose Wisdom reveals the Truth of the Dharma's Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness that embraces and keeps embracing all beings without any discriminations and favoritism to bring all to final enlightenment. The purpose of this Epistle, therefore, is not to intimidate a person with guilt feelings and uncertainties concerning a supreme being who rewards "good people" and punishes "evil people." For Amida Buddha in the center shrine on the upper sanctuary of our temple is not to be worshipped as some kind of all-knowing and all-powerful Supreme Being who can contravene the facts of causality or reverse the consequences of karma, that is, if they obey him and do his will.

The raised right hand of Amida with his thumb and forefinger forming a "perfect seamless circle" represents the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness in the form of Wisdom's Light shining equally on all sentient beings to "awaken" them all without exceptions. Shin Buddhists worship this aspect of Dharma as Infinite Light referred to as *Amitayus*. This is the significance of the second line of the *Shoshin Ge*: "I entrust myself to the Inconceivable Light! (*namoh fukashigi ko*)."

Amida's lowered left hand with the thumb and forefinger also forms a "perfect seamless circle." This represents the Dharma's Reality of Togetherness in the form of All-embracing Compassion constantly grasping and tirelessly embracing all sentient beings without rejections to bring them all to the safety of the Other Shore, or Nirvana without residues. This aspect of Dharma as Immeasurable Life is referred to as *Amitabha*. This is the significance of the first line of the *Shoshin Ge*: "I take refuge in the Tathagata of Immeasurable Life! (*kimyo muryo ju nyorai*)."

Therefore Amida is infinite Light and Immeasurable Life.

As we enter this year's O'Bon season (June-August 2011) let us recall and call to fond memory our

deceased loved ones, especially all our ancestral fathers and mothers for at least seven generations into our past, as recommended in the *Ullambana Sutta*. If you do so, you will be astounded at the number of ancestral fathers and mothers there had to be before you yourself could have been born. In the short span of just seven generations there had to be 126 parents that connected down to each of your one and only fathers and your one and only mothers before you yourself could have been conceived and born. Without your dad and mom you could not have been born as a human being with the five spiritual powers of conscience! This also is true concerning each of our ancestral fathers or mothers in each of their generations. If any one father or mother in any of the past generations connected to you were missing, you then, as of consequence, would not have been born.

Now, the following words of Shinran below seem to say that holding special O'Bon memorial services for our deceased loved ones are unnecessary. The words are:

... I have never said the nembutsu even once for the repose of my departed father and mother. For all sentient beings, without exception, have been our parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in many states of existence ... SBT-Series. *A Record in Lament of Differences*. Ch. V. p. 19.

These words, however, become meaningful only when the underlying reason as to why Shinran said them are truly grasped and understood. The underlying reason is because:

... all sentient beings, without exception, have been our parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in many states of existence. .... *Ibid*.

Furthermore, the other reason why Shinran said these words is:

... Were saying the nembutsu indeed a good act in which I strove through my own powers, then I might direct the merit thus gained toward saving my father and mother. But this is not the case. *Ibid*.

In other words, Shinran realized that true recitations of nembutsu are not of our own doing. Saying nembutsu, therefore, can never be prayers initiated from our side as a supplication asking Amida Buddha for some kind of personal miracle or for some kind of special magical intervention in behalf of a deceased loved one. For we human beings certainly do not have such virtues or possess such powers as to "petition" some kind of almighty deity to reverse the effects of natural

causation or to cancel the consequences of our or for another person's bad karma.

Therefore, Yuiembo in the second half of the *Tannisho* explains the reasons as to why Shinran Shonin did not "invoke" the nembutsu as a supernatural prayer or magical supplication for some kind of a miracle in behalf of his parent's peaceful repose. For, says Yuiembo, Shinran was fully aware that:

The desire to eradicate one's karmic evil through saying the Name arises from the heart of self-power, it is the basic intent of people who pray to be in the state of right-mindedness when their lives end. It therefore reveals an absence of shinjin that is Other Power. *loc. cite.* Ch 14. p. 40.

Shinran, therefore, was fully aware that such recitations of nembutsu were tainted by one's "spiritual egoism" assuming that by invoking nembutsu one can influence Amida for a personal favor. This would mean that such a person sees Amida Buddha to be some kind of omnipotent deity who can outright contravene causation and cancel the effects and affects of one's bad karma.

This is why Shinran Shonin also came to the understanding that:

The nembutsu, for its practitioners, is not a practice or a good act. Since it is not performed out of one's own designs, it is not a practice. Since it is not a good done through one's own calculation, it is not a good act. Because it arises wholly from Other Power and is free of self-power, for the practitioner, it is not a practice or a good act. *op. cite.* Ch. 8. pp. 21, 22.

What these words mean for us as Shin Buddhists holding O'Bon memorial services for our deceased loved ones is that our recitations of nembutsu can be only an expression of our gratitude and indebtedness for "all sentient beings" because they "have been at one time or another our fathers and mothers, as well as our brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives and states of existence ...." Therefore, we should also express our deepest gratitude to our one and only fathers and especially to our one and only mothers because they are the ones, the very ones, who brought us into this very world as a human beings with the powers of a conscience.

For this reason, according to the *Ullambana Sutta*, we should recall our deceased loved ones and reflect on the happy as well the unhappy times that we endured together with our deceased loved ones when they were once with us.

More importantly, we should express gratitude to each and every Buddha in the "ten boundless regions

and endless directions of the universe" that have, are and continue to converge upon us to awaken the "voiceless voice" of Amida in our "deepest conscienceness." Especially should we express profound gratitude to Amida Buddha who has vowed never to forsake or abandon any sentient being until all of them, including us, attain Buddhahood. This is why Amida is called our "Eternal Parent."

## QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What are the 84,000 Dharma gates?

ANSWER: The number "84,000" is an arbitrary number. The number suggests that the Way to the Dharma is many and varied as there are all kinds of individuals with their differing idiosyncrasies and needs.

The significance of this "number" is illustrated by the metaphor of a person on the top of a mountain saying: "The way I got to the top of the mountain is the only way to get to where I am!"

This is why the Buddha said: "... To be attached to one thing (to a certain view) and to look down upon other things (views) as inferior – this the wise men call a fetter." Sn (PTS) p. 152 (v. 798).

## BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

.... I will teach you the Truth and the Path leading to the Truth. S.V. (PTS), p. 369.

... It is not proper for a wise man who maintains (lit. protects) truth to come to the conclusion: "This alone is Truth, and everything else is false." *Canki Sutta*. No. 95 of M.

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