



GASSHO

January

2012

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



Happy New Year 2012 !



MONTH'S THOUGHT



A common mistake is to confuse Socialism, the economic system, with Communism, the political system. Communists are "socialists" in the same way that Republicans are "compassionate conservatives." That is, they give lip service to ideals they have no intention of practicing. — *anonymous blog*.



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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR JANUARY 2012

1st SUNDAY, Jan 1st, 2012:

"New Year's Day Service"
10 A.M. English Service

2nd SUN Jan 8th:

9 a.m. English Service
Dharma Talk
for
Children & Adults
Rev. Roland Tatsuguchi

3rd SUN Jan 15th:

GOSHOOKI HOONKO
SERVICE
9 a.m. English Service
Guest Speaker:
Rev. Alan Urasaki
Chaplain, Federal Prison

4th SUN Jan 22nd:

9 a.m. English Service
Dharma Talk
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

5th SUN Jan 29th:

MONTHLY
FAMILY WORSHIP
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

KARAOKE SINGERS CLUB Mon 7 - 9 p.m.
Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

KARATE CLASSES Tues & Fri 6 - 8 p.m.
Shihan - Walter Nishioka

FUJINKAI LADIES' FELLOWSHIP GROUP
Wed 9 a.m. - noon
J. Kobuke / A. Murata

HAWAII EISA CHIMUGUKURU DAIKO
Wed & Thurs 6.30 - 8.30 p.m.
Mr. Van Shimabukuro

THANK YOU
for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

General Meeting
February 12, 2012

REFLECTIONS FOR 2012

rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Dear members and friends of Shinshu Kyokai, a "Happy New Year" to you all! May this year 2012 bring more people together in peace as one family.

Professor Alfred Bloom, in his recent article *Issues in Propagation of Shin Buddhism in the West*, notes that while Europeans and Americans are drawn to Theravada, Tibetan and Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, they are not drawn to the teachings of Shinran Shonin. Bloom notes, therefore, that in Shin temples such as ours the "issei members have passed away" and have not been replaced by new members. Which means that the *nisei*, *sansei* and *yonsei* have become indifferent and less supportive of their *issei* parents' religious beliefs and ancestral heritage.

There are several reasons as to why this is so. For instance, instant travel and communication, social and economic mobility, cross-cultural mixings and interracial marriages, these and other phenomena have now become global. Furthermore, the steady advances in science, technology, medicine and professional disciplines have steadily undermined and displaced ethnocentric folklore, superstitions, racist attitudes and practices. Modernity also continues to play a role in the Japanese American's declining of interest in his immigrant *issei* heritage, especially in Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, etc.

In fact, the *nisei* of today are grandparents and great-grandparents in their declining twilight years. Their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, like the progeny of other early immigrant minorities from Europe also have become hyphenated and multi-hyphenated Americans. They are now technicians, specialists and professionals in a post-modern world. Man's knowledge keeps expanding as he keeps probing into things scientifically, medically and technologically. Like their ethnic peers, Japanese Americans have also become "consummate consumers" of a variety of processed foods, material goods, complex electronic gadgets and labor-saving devices based on a marketing of endless merchandise just off the mass production lines.

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

Master Shan-tao has written ... Sakyamuni, Amida, and the Buddhas in the ten quarters, all with the same mind, are no more apart from sentient beings of the nembutsu than shadows from things.... SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 2. p. 24

Another key reason for this disenchantment with *issei* heritage was that the *issei* Buddhist ministers did not come as the "evangelists" or "missionaries" did with the specific goal of "converting" peoples of other ethnicities over to Shin Buddhism. As of consequence, many *issei* Buddhist ministers did not make the effort to learn to read, write or speak English. Nor did they learn the language of other immigrant minorities with the biblically mandated goal of "converting" non-Christians and Christianizing the nations of the world.

For, before and at the turn of the 19th century, Buddhist priests came to serve their fellow *issei* who had immigrated to Hawaii and the continental United States as menial laborers who, then, were not only racially discriminated against, but also socially, culturally, economically and politically exploited and oppressed. Many of the *issei* who came as contracted plantation workers did not read, write, speak or understand English. As foreigners, they were especially "profiled" as idol worshipping heathens by the New England missionaries whose second-generation descendants by then were already in control of the island's economy and politics through a hegemonic conglomerate called the "Big Five."

This initial dominance by the first New England missionary families resulted in closely knit neighborhoods of White families within the larger community of ethnic neighborhoods. The White landed gentry and entrepreneurs from the U.S. and Europe in control of the island's economy were living in their plush Victorian style homes within well designated and exclusive communities such as in Manoa, Nuuanu, Kahala, the slopes off Diamond Head and other select districts within Honolulu like Alewa and Pacific Heights. On the plantations, the immigrant field workers were segregated by ethnicity into camps of Japanese, Korean, Portuguese and Filipino families. The plantation manager's home with its privileged status and amenities was situated usually on a hill overlooking the camps of their field workers' shacks that were furnished with the barest of furnishings. Like the Chinese who preceded them, the Japanese soon after began establishing their own temples, shrines, language schools, cultural classes and prefectural associations that held the *issei* together as an interconnected "community" in Honolulu though

they lived in their various enclaved neighborhoods such as in Kalihi, Palama, Kakaako, Pawaa, McCully and Moiliili neighborhood districts.

This "clustering" of *issei* families resulted in the charge that Shinto priests and Buddhist ministers were fostering "enclaved" and "ethnized" forms of religious services because they were conducted in Japanese, often in difficult classical Japanese phonetic readings of complex Chinese ideograms. Furthermore, the Japanese Schools conducted were especially seen to be fostering Japanese nationalism, loyalties and warrior spirit (*bushido*). These allegations had the effect of alienating the *nisei*, *sansei* and now the *yonsei* from their ancestral religions and heritage.

During WWII, the Japanese American especially became estranged from the core values of their *issei* parents such as piety. For many *nisei* and their progeny, especially during WWII, did not bother to learn to read, write or understand Japanese because the U.S. was then at war with Japan. Many, as a result, could not appreciate the deeper philosophical and ethical meanings of Chinese pictographs and ideographs. Furthermore, rising from the ranks of their *issei* parents who were mainly menial laborers, the *nisei*, as American-born citizens by then had become technicians, specialists, professionals, and, more significantly, business and financial speculators in the land of opportunity and plenty. They became absorbed and learned to invest in stocks as did the progeny of other immigrant groups. After WWII they became especially embroiled in local politics.

Back in the early 1950s, I was in Kansas attending Baker University in Baldwin. It was then in this rural college community that I began to realize how the United States was a nation deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian core values as it still is today. Many midwesterners did not know that Hawaii was part of the United States. I was often mistaken for a Native American Indian. For the people I got to know in Kansas were influenced by Protestant Christianity mainly of the Calvinist orientation. I got to know why Kansas and the other states around it were called the "Bible Belt." It was then that I became quite aware that I, in sociological and psychological terms, was a "marginal man," or a person caught between his ancestral cultural beliefs, perspectives and traditions, for now I was living in a college community whose students believed in the one and only God, the Creator of all that exists. Pilgrim pride and Puritan perspectives stressed the necessity of being an "independent, self-reliant" and resourceful rugged individual who also believed in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount.

American heritage is especially also based on the virtues, values and mentality of being an "individual" who is an opportunist, adventurer, pioneer and settler of virgin lands. This mentality was triggered by early

Europeans beginning with the Portuguese and Spanish, who began to navigate, discover, conquer and settle newly discovered virgin lands as they began to appropriate and claim the land of others. They began to displace and/or decimate the Native American Indians wherever they went over the American continents as they appropriated the ancestral lands of native peoples by fencing them into lots and personal property for personal gain and profit even well before the Declaration of Independence. This westward expansionism was envisioned and encouraged by Congress and backed by the U.S. military. The facts of American history clearly and undeniably show this to be a fact. To survive in the wilderness, one had to be resilient, resourceful, creative, self-reliant, vigilant and ever ready to react and respond to any threat or emergency, for otherwise one could lose one's life in an instant.

I decided, therefore, to gather data on this matter about the Japanese American being a psychologically and socially "marginalized" person caught between two competing cultures, trying to retain his ancestral heritage based on being "non-intrusive," "non-overbearing" and "non-opinionated" as against a heritage that encourages a person to be "demanding," "assertive" and "self-reliant," a person who values the qualities of being "expressive," "outgoing," "competitive" and "aggressive." A person in making a name for himself had to establish a reputation and acquire conspicuous wealth and possessions. You see the influence of this legacy in the lives of John Owen Dominis, Charles Reed Bishop, Archibald Scott Cleghorn and others who came to Hawaii in the 1800s from a superior culture of Western scientific knowledge and technology, who then married into Hawaiian royalty to become land and money rich at the expense of commoner Native Hawaiians, the *kanaka maoli*, and later the various immigrants. This legacy is especially seen in the life of Walter Francis Dillingham, who was dubbed "the Baron of Hawaii's industry," a key and central figure in the days of the "Big Five."

To gather such information and data concerning the dilemma and problems that a Japanese American experienced as a "marginal man," I stayed the whole summer of 1954 at the Tri-State Buddhist Church in Denver. The congregation first began as the Denver Buddhist Church in a renovated brothel in 1913 on 1942 Market Street. This fact in itself tells us of the political, social, economic and racial hardships the first *issei* in Denver city and its environs experienced right at the turn of the 19th century when they had to endure much discrimination. As menial laborers they were treated as aliens and heathens who were seen as inferior to the Whites. As aliens they had no vote or recourse to the courts. They were much like the *issei* who began Shinshu Kyokai at the end of Aloha Lane that began as an obscure group holding outdoor services under a tree who then built a temple annex next to a

Judo hall in 1914 right above the mauka border of the Pah'ke Patch in the Pawaa neighborhood.

Denver Buddhist Church, like Shinshu Kyokai, was then relocated to an auditorium-like facility located in a predominant Black neighborhood (1947 Lawrence Street). Its members were settled in and around Denver City. Because it also served their parishioners who had settled in Nebraska and even far away as Wyoming, and surprisingly, even in Kansas and Texas, the congregation came to be known as the Tri-State Buddhist Church. Rev. Tamai spoke of how several sets of tires (minimum six sets) were worn out in the course of a year's long-distance driving in order to get to his individual parishioners' home to perform memorial services for their deceased ancestors. Today, due to Rev. Yoshitaka Tamai's lifelong dedication and work since his assignment there in 1930 (died in 1983 after 53 years of service), he came to be known as the "Shinran Shonin of Denver." Eventually the Denver Church was relocated and rebuilt as a high-rise emporia in his memory and is now referred to as the Tamai Tower (1255 19th Street).

I was nineteen when Rev. Tamai visited Shinshu Kyokai on June 27, 1950. He was accompanied by Rev. Hozen Seki from New York City. They had come all the way to Hawaii seeking donations from Buddhists here for Rev. Seki's proposed Buddhist Academy in New York (1216 5th Avenue). This is how I got to know Rev. Tamai, who like my dad, did not speak, write or understand any English. Rev. Seki, however, was bilingual. So, as a graduate student now working for a master's degree at Kansas University in Lawrence, I had my parents write Rev. Tamai a letter asking if he could introduce me to some *nisei* families in his congregation so I could interview them and collect data for my Master's thesis.

This is how I got to stay at the Tri-State Buddhist Church which then, as mentioned, was a modest sized auditorium-like building, about the size of our temple Social Hall. On the stage was a portable Amida shrine that could be rolled forward for major services and rolled back to let down a huge movie screen to show Japanese movies for the *issei* and *nisei* members who had traveled long distances to get to Denver City to attend the major services like Gotan-E or O-Bon. The movies were not only to entertain them but were also nostalgic and therapeutic. For the *issei* were in a foreign land far from their birthplace homes in Japan or *furusato*. For many of the members were farmers isolated and often excluded from the dominant Whites as they lived on their remote rural farm homes far from Denver City itself. The fact that they could not speak or understand English set them even further apart as visible Japanese aliens because of the White supremacist sentiments with racial overtones and undertones often unseen and quite subtle.

SHINRAN'S WASAN

Those who enter the Serenity
of the Pure Land's Bliss,
Return then to the worlds
full with the five defilements.
And as did Sakyamuni Buddha,
endlessly benefit sentient beings!

JODO WASAN No. 20.

rkt trans.

I was allowed to stay in the visiting minister's guest room and allowed to use the church kitchenette to cook my meals. This is how I got to meet Rev. Shodo Tsunoda, who was then a bilingual assistant minister to Rev. Tamai. Rev. Tsunoda and his wife had adopted Rev. Tamai's niece since they had no children of their own. They were living as a family elsewhere in a nearby neighborhood. Rev. Tsunoda later became Bishop of the Buddhist Churches of Canada.

Due to Rev. Tamai's kindness and support, I was able to interview several Japanese-American families, individuals and professionals in and around Denver City throughout that summer. I had driven all the way from Lawrence in a jalopy of a third-hand two-door sedan to Denver. The car's transmission broke down as soon as I returned to Henry Coop, a dormitory for male students where I was rooming and boarding nearby the Kansas U. campus. The residents did all the chores like meal preparation, laundry, house cleaning, etc., on a rotation basis to cut down on living expenses such as water, gas and electricity. Whenever I recall the summer I spent in Denver, I often reflect in muted silence, if Amida Buddha had not been with me all the way to and all the while I was driving here and there in Denver City and, finally, all the way back to Henry Coop in Lawrence, what would have happened. For the car's transmission, strangely, as mentioned, suddenly broke down as soon as I returned to park in front of the dormitory. So, I often wonder, should the car have broken down anywhere, especially between the endless fields of wheat and corn in Kansas and the open plains of Denver, I probably would have been in a great dilemma as to what to do. Therefore, whenever I think of these times of the summer of 1954, I often wonder if Amida wasn't with me and watching over me all the time! I now realize that Amida has never left or will ever leave my side to forsake or abandon me, even after I have taken my last breath of life!

Okage-sama de, I was able to return safely and finally submit a thesis to graduate with a master's degree. It was entitled: *The Japanese Americans in Process: A Problem in Acculturation with Special*

Reference to Familial and Linguistic Bonds (June 1955). Upon graduation I returned to Honolulu for a brief stay. Then with a Prince Akihito Scholarship, I headed straight for Kyoto to do further graduate work in Shin Buddhism at Ryukoku University. I obtained an M.A. in Shin Buddhism and after undergoing a full ordination, I was duly certified as a minister of the Nishi Hongwanji denomination to teach and preach Jodoshinshu. My father, who had taken a leave of absence from Shinshu Kyokai to take care of some matters concerning his birthplace temple in Inokuchi Hiroshima, was already in Japan. So he had come to get me when I landed at Haneda in Tokyo and take me to matriculate at Ryukoku University in Kyoto. In having just lost the war, Japan then was totally different from what it is today. The ordinary Japanese citizen, especially during and right after WWII, was struggling for lack of daily necessities such as things like toilet tissue. Rice was still being rationed, besides other things.

Therefore, in this January issue of GASSHO 2012, I would like once again to quote a few of Rev. Tamai's words from his *ICHINYO* (Oneness or Non-Duality, translated by Rev. Tsunoda) concerning the post-WWII years, with some of my personal commentary in fond memory of him. For what he said then about the race for nuclear weapons that began after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki continues to cast an ominous cloud over all of humankind. An all-out nuclear war could wipe out all mankind from the face of this earth. Some speak of the possibility not as an "if" but as a "when" it will happen. Leading the race for nuclear dominance is the so-called "military industrial congressional complex" [MICC] of our nation with its often open display of its overwhelming military might and dominance of space, air, land and the oceans of the world. There also is a continuous ongoing undercover, covert and surreptitious activity of intrigue and espionage between super power nations to determine as to whether a nation is "an ally" or "an enemy."

Concerning this spying and race for nuclear weapons, Tamai sensei in his day said:

We live in a very frightening age. The world of science has given birth to the age of space travel and has fathered the hydrogen bomb. Compared with some of the weapons that are now available, the first atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima was almost like a toy, but 420,000 persons still suffer the effects of that time bomb, 22 years after it was dropped. The families of these victims also suffer. (pp. 1, 2)

The Buddha some 2,500 years ago taught that to "right a wrong" with another "wrong" does not lead to peace. Not only is it "not right," but any act of war cannot be considered to be a "just war," even if it be in the name of "justice," for the resulting bloodshed and

mayhem, said the Buddha, only serves to breed more acts of vengeance and violence.

Threats of nuclear retaliation in the guise of "nuclear deterrence," therefore, serve only to "spawn" and "trigger" similar counter threats of nuclear retaliation. This fear and suspicion generated between nations continues to propel the ongoing development and stocking of nuclear arsenals in secrecy. This build up has resulted not only in the proliferation of nuclear weapons but also the development of other biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction. Nations such as Israel could not have come by their Weapons of Mass Destruction without the surreptitious support and financial backing of the U.S. as backed by Israeli Zionist lobby groups such as the Christians United For Israel (CUFI), the longest pro-Israel Christian organization in the U.S.

Rev. Tamai, therefore, points out that the underlying problem is to be found in a person or a nation taking the position that he, and his religion and country, are in the "right" and "justified by divine providence" while others are "wrong" and "unjust." Such was the case when former President George W. Bush declared that nations not joining the United States in the fight against Muslim terrorists were part of the "axis of evil." According to Buddhism, making such statements such as you are either "for us" or "against us," this has been and continues to be the problem that underlies all dualisms. Dual means two. Dualism means to cut, split and divide something that was originally one into two parts to set them at odds and against each other, to then maintain that one side is "just" and "good" while the other side is "unjust" and "evil." This is like cutting a pie into two halves and calling one half "edible" and the other half "inedible" though they were originally parts of a same pie made up of the same ingredients.

Buddhism is not an "-ism." Indeed it is a grave error to characterize what the Buddha taught as a pessimism, positivism and negativism, or an idealism, realism, spiritualism or a sensualism, and so forth, endlessly. To do so becomes an error of grave ramifications. This is why what the Buddha taught cannot be characterized to be an "-ism" because what he taught was the Truth of Selflessness based on the Reality of Togetherness, or a Oneness that is not a duality that splits itself into separate opposing parts that conflict with the other.

A dualist is a person who divides things or people into opposite camps to then set one side in conflict against the other side. Such oppositions, as between a "heaven" and "hell," "saints" and "sinners" or "angels" and "demons," these are but some examples. In short, a dualist simply assumes that he himself alone is "right" while those who disagree or oppose him are "wrong," if not "evil," "demonic," and, therefore, his

"enemies" to be annihilated and destroyed if it becomes necessary to do so. The problem with a dualist is that he "perceives" things either to be absolutely "good" or totally "evil." In doing so, he automatically "profiles" people either to be a "friend" or an "enemy" that must be overcome and, if necessary, obliterated.

In short, a person who subscribes to an "-ism" is also an "-ist," like a dogmatist, racist or an egotist who is a separatist, elitist, exclusivist or a supremacist. Thus, a person who is a thorough going egotist is a person who subscribes to an "-ism" such as capitalism or communism to distinguish and set up unbridgeable walls between persons, for example, between capitalists and communists. Such a person then becomes an extremist like a jihadist and an exclusionist who is an elitist.

For these reasons, said Tamai sensei:

... the natures of both democratic capitalism and communism are the same. Both strengthen our ego. Both are social systems that place our ego at the center, and that is why they are so frightening.... (p. 5)

So, Rev. Tamai, in reviewing Western civilization's imperialistic expansionism beginning with the Greeks up to Alexander the Great's invasion of India, all the way up then to the genocidal displacement of Native American Indians by Anglo-Saxon Americans ever since the Declaration of Independence, and up to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, noted that:

Both democracy and communism are revolutionary movements that caused much blood to flow. Democracy developed when the American colonies revolted against what they thought was unfair taxation by England. Communism as a political force developed with the frightening Russian revolution of 1917. It is a movement that has caused the death of great numbers of peoples. (*ibid.*)

Therefore, he spoke of the importance of believing, trusting and taking refuge in the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness radiating as Amida's Wisdom's Light radiating with its Compassion's Life that unconditionally embraces all things and sentient beings in a Oneness without exceptions and rejections.

According to Tamai sensei, "neither democracy [capitalism] nor communism [socialism] is a movement toward peace" (p. 5). The simple reason being,

Because there is so much emphasis placed on individualism at present, and because everything is centered around the individual ego, it is impossible for the average American to think other than in a dualistic way.... (p. 4)

These words then help explain as to why former President George Walker Bush declared a "preemptive war" against all Muslim jihadists and unilaterally stormed into Iraq without Congressional approval. It also explains why he paraphrased the words of Jesus to declare to all the nations of the world: "either you are with us or against us" (Matt. 12: 30). What George Bush said, as Tamai sensei implies, was an outcome of his dualistic thinking which then led him to the conclusion: "evil must be judged, it must be punished and destroyed" (p. 4).

This is why according to Gore Vidal, the "military-industrial-congressional complex" [MICC] of our nation as supported by American Zionist and other lobby groups representing the weapons industry keep perpetuating war after war in the name of maintaining perpetual peace in the guise of spreading the ideals of democracy, equality and justice the world over as a cover and justification for the exploitation of other peoples and their natural resources by our mega-global multi-national corporations. The involvement of the U.S. in the present ongoing wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, as well as in its involvement in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and now being specifically aimed against Iran, these developments of our nation tells us that what Vidal says about our nation being involved in perpetual wars is an undeniable fact!

As we can clearly see, this confrontation between the forces of "good" and "evil" since man's known history continues to persist between individuals, ethnic groups, and between sovereign nations. This is because of their differing views, values, agendas and ultimate goals as justified by the "isms" they subscribe to such as egoism, personalism, patriotism, nationalism and so forth. Such divisiveness and conflicts even now continue in the very hallowed halls of our Congress between Republicans supporting conservatism and Democrats espousing liberalism. Many domestic and foreign lobbyists, for better or for worse, are at work within the walls of our Congress trying to influence our legislators with their under the table big money, personal favors, all-expenses-paid junkets and guaranteed plush high paying CEO jobs upon their retirement in a closed circle of "insiders" who are in power and control of a "revolving door," a game of "musical chairs" between bankers, industrialists, military brass and Congressmen, meaning, if you scratch my back I will scratch yours.

In his time, Rev. Tamai, therefore, felt that post-WWII Japan, like other Asian nations, had become uncritical in the wholesale acceptance of Western science, technology, materialism and pragmatism as based on a capitalistic system whose goal is the making of inordinate amounts of wealth by exploiting sources of cheap labor and appropriating the natural resources of so-called underdeveloped Third World countries through a global monetary banking system that increases its own profits at the expense of indigenous

native peoples while depleting their lands' raw materials and resources, while leaving their habitats devastated after the resources have been depleted. This proclivity now can be clearly seen in contemporary China's rapid rise and dominance as an economic and military power in the arena of Super Power nations through her international diplomacy and global capitalistic ventures in which their rich are also now becoming richer, the "haves," while their poor are becoming poorer, the "have nots."

For these reasons, Tamai sensei felt that Japanese Americans, especially the "westernized" Japanese in Japan, have "thrown out without consideration" Buddhist insights, principles, values and sentiments without thinking because they considered them to be "outdated" and, therefore, "obsolete" and "non-practical."

As Alfred Bloom quoted above noted, "because Theravada Buddhism focuses and emphasizes personal responsibility, discipline and practice, Caucasians are drawn and attracted to its sense of personal accountability and self reliance." Such Caucasians, therefore, are not drawn to Jodo Shin Buddhism that is based on a life of piety and indebtedness, gratitude, reverence, especially a quiet penitence that has been awakened by a faith and trust in Amida Buddha's Vows of Selflessness and Togetherness full of Boundless and Unconditional Compassion.

Tamai sensei likewise noted that the "gap" between the *sansei*, *yonse*i and *nisei* from their parental *issei* generation was widening. He also noted that what was happening during and right after WWII to Buddhism in Japan was in sharp contrast to what was happening to it in the U.S. proper. So he noted:

This is in complete contrast with the United States where many, particularly the young [meaning Caucasians], eagerly seek to discover the Buddhist insight into life and living. I believe Buddha-dharma is what will set American democracy right, and save us from the dangers of our age. (p. 3, [] mine)

I myself also believe that we as hyphenated and multi-hyphenated Americans of various racial ancestries and cultural heritages need to truly reflect on what has and continues to be happening all over the world and become aware of the real reasons as to "why" and "how" many in the "land and home of the brave and the free" have and are losing their jobs, homes, and especially the opportunities to better themselves due to the heartless financial institutions and faceless corporations pursuing their own agendas of monetary profits based on a mass production system that continues to displace human hands with their robotic systems and the human mind with a computer comprised of electrical circuits and impulses referred to as an "artificial intelligence,"

much of which can be likened to how evangelical Christians see their God as being an "intelligent designer" who is in full control of his creatures and creations, much like a watchmaker who has put together a watch out of the void (*ex nihilo*) who keeps winding it to keep it "ticking" and "tocking."

Tamai says that too much "emphasis is placed on individual rights and personal freedoms." The "rights of individuals" has been misinterpreted and misapplied in terms of being a person's "inalienable right" to pursue and secure his own personal freedoms, liberties, prosperity and happiness, even if they have to be obtained at the expense of his fellow human beings' safety and happiness as well as that of innocent creatures and vulnerable environments. This one-sided pursuit of "personal rights" and "personal freedoms" has resulted in the ever widening "chasm" between the few who are in the "haves" [multi-millionaires and -billionaires] and the "many" who are in the "have nots" [heavily indebted to our banking and loaning institutions, and living on credit]. Because we have become a populace that disdains menial labor, we, as of consequence, have also become a nation of hard-nosed entrepreneurs, speculators and investors exploiting sources of cheap labor and the natural and mineral resources of vulnerable Third World countries. In the meanwhile, the exploited who labor and toil exist in substandard living conditions because of the devastation of their living environments that have and even now are resulting in unsafe health and living conditions.

As of consequence, we have become a people who try "to get the most money while doing the least amount of work for it" (p. 3). Therefore, said Tamai sensei, "I believe this attitude will destroy the United States" (*ibid.*). For this very reason, the Reverend concluded: "I believe the biggest defect in American democracy is that there is no feeling of gratitude towards others," and said that: "this is what Buddha-dharma has to teach the people of the United States" (*ibid.*). What the good Reverend was referring to even way back then in the 1940s and 1950s was the life of indebtedness (*on'doku*) or gratitude (*kan'sha*) and reverence full of humility and especially penitence or feelings of compassion and commiseration.

A life of penitence awakened by a faith that is true and genuine is based on the profound awareness that one's own life, out of natural necessity, has to feed on the lives of countless innocent things and creatures for one's own very survival. Penitence in this sense is not a confession, contrition or repentance of one's sins as expressed to some "supreme almighty deity" through formalized rituals in the hopes of obtaining one's salvation. Such penitence is born of an awareness that has been awakened by the Truth of Wisdom and its Compassion that fills a person with a commiseration full of heartfelt sadness, regret and remorse that one's life as such, as Charles Darwin discovered, has, is and

continues to be engaged in the unavoidable struggle and survival of the fittest through the evolutionary process of natural selection, such as in our oceans where the "big fish" eat the "small fish."

This undeniable fact of life is one of the deeper meanings implied by the First Noble Truth that "life is indeed full of suffering." To become infused by such a commiseration and penitence is to begin countering the ongoing heartless disregard, insensitivity, wastefulness and excessiveness that characterizes the life of a "mindless consummate consumer" of endless things and goods derived from the destruction of all kinds of life forms. A person without awareness, regret or remorse concerning this undeniable fact indulges only in a life of sense gratifications and self indulgence characterized by an excessiveness and wastefulness that is extravagant!

This is why, Tamai sensei in his time concluded:

I firmly believe that if the thought of *ichinyo* (oneness), indebtedness to others, and the great goal of *nirvana*, enter the thought of democracy, that the United States will truly become a nation that can lead the peoples of the world. I firmly believe the great mission that we Buddhists in the United States have is to bring about this realization in the peoples of the United States. (pp. 3, 4)

Presently, the Republicans are doing everything they can to bring down President Barak Hussein Obama and his administration, while the "have nots" (96%) are glaring at the "haves," (4% and its elite upper 1%). The former are in the majority, and the masses struggling to survive on this difference have been characterized to be Main Street, "the outsiders," while the latter in the minority have been seen as Wall Street, "the insiders." The "haves" are those who are in the so-called Belt Way who have the money, power, wherewithal and political clout to influence legislators to enact or change existing laws to their advantage and benefits (the "military industrial congressional complex"). So presently, the "have nots" as "outsiders" are shouting and screaming about their personal and individual "rights," "freedoms" and especially issues concerning "equal opportunity" and "justice" for all.

According to Tamai sensei, the teaching of Oneness (Selflessness = Togetherness) "... is the teaching in which all creation is one, in which all things have the same basis." And this is why all things should and must be looked upon as "being the same" (p 6). What this means is that the Buddhist view of things and life is not the biblical one in which all of creation was created by a Creator God for the sole and explicit use and benefit of man alone, who alone was created in his image.

What Oneness means in the arena of human relations, said Tamai sensei, is that:

We must not set things in opposition to each other and then glare at the opposition. Because there are people who work, there are those who put up capital. Because some people put up capital, others are able to work. Because there are people who buy, others are able to sell. Because there are those who sell, others are able to buy. Because of the physician, patients are healed, and conversely, because the patient is healed, the physician becomes a physician. (pp. 6, 7)

The problem today, as mentioned, is that the capitalistic system which has become global is now a multi-national corporate system comprised of faceless CEOs who see human beings more as "machines" who have no physical or human or spiritual needs. The higher-ups in the military organization of a nation in war time see the citizens it conscripts to become soldiers as cannon fodder, while the innocent citizens accidentally killed in the process are merely referred to as "collateral damage." People and things have become statistics, mere commodities and prices identified through bar codes such as on a driver's license or a person's credit card.

Stated another way, a man cannot be a husband without a woman who is his wife, and vice versa. A husband cannot become a father until his wife becomes a mother who has given birth to their first child. It is only then the two of them at the same time become parents because of their first-born child. This is the meaning and underlying significance of the teaching of "non-duality" or "interdependency," or what I call Togetherness that connects the myriad of things and life in a sacred relationship of Oneness. Simply put, we "cannot be happy by venting anger at one another." We "cannot be happy by hating one another." This means "we cannot glare at each other." For, we will never be happy unless we help each other selflessly. We "cannot stand in opposition and conflict to each other." This is what the Truth of Selflessness and the Actuality of Togetherness enables us to do and overcome, or what Tamai sensei means by *Ichinyo* or "Oneness," or the "unity of diverse things and life in a sacred togetherness!"

Therefore, according to Jodoshinshu teachings,

The sun, the air, and water are not things we created. Food was not created solely through our efforts. Even machinery that we might feel is entirely man-made only makes use of natural laws that we have discovered and used to our benefit. Without these natural laws, machinery would not work. How much more so would we be unable to continue living only

through our own efforts? In order for me to exist, I require the forces of the entire universe. The fact that I am here like this, is because of heaven, and because of all of you. (p. 7)

Therefore, the words of Tamai sensei are most significant for us today who are living under the dark clouds of falsehoods, conflicts and violence.

Therefore, said Tamai Sensei,

We must not let science be omnipotent, or let money be the end-all. Nor can we let only law, or only reason and logic, be most important. We cannot have cold hearts that murder our parents for money. We cannot consider only ourselves to be correct, and judge others on that basis. (p. 7)

Once again, Best Wishes to all of you for the year 2012. May the words of Tamai sensei as quoted be a source of strength and reflection especially in our confused and troubled times full of fears, uncertainties, falsehoods and virtual realities based on digital artificial intelligence. *Namoh-amida-butsu.*

BUDDHIST STORY OR PASSAGE

People in this world are prone to be selfish and unsympathetic; they do not know how to love and respect one another; they argue and quarrel over trifling affairs only to their own harm and suffering, and life becomes but a dreary round of unhappiness.

Regardless of whether they are rich or poor, they worry about money; they suffer from poverty and they suffer from wealth. Because their lives are controlled by greed, they are never contented, never satisfied. *THE TEACHING OF BUDDHA.* BDK (Eng/Jpnse pp. 188, 190)

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What does it mean to be a Buddhist?

ANSWER: According to Walpola Rahula in his *What the Buddha Taught* (p. 80), "there is no initiation ceremony (or baptism) in order to become a Buddhist. This is the reason why I have often made a distinction between Buddhist "awakening" as being a "transformative experience" in contrast to a "conversion," in

which a "convert" switches from one set of beliefs to another set of beliefs, or a differing set of dogmatisms.

According to Rahula, a person who takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Samgha and lives by the minimal Five Buddhist Precepts: not to destroy life, not to steal, not to commit improper sexual acts, not to tell lies and not to ingest harmful foods or drinks, such a person, according to "age-old tradition," is a Buddhist.

This is why I often repeat and keep repeating, the Dharma is not the monopoly of any one person, race, culture, creed, ideology, religion, designated geographical place or specific point in historical time. This is exactly why Sakyamuni Buddha said to make the Dharma itself one's only refuge, and not himself as the source of one's final refuge. This is also why Shinran said, "I know not what is truly 'good' or 'evil,'" and why he said "I have no disciple."

continued from p. 2

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