



# GASSHO

## February

### 2012

Issue No:02-12

*"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"*



## BUDDHISM IS NOT AN "-ISM!"

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Once again, I wish to emphasize the fact that "what the Buddha taught" was not an "-ism" such as an asceticism or a hedonism. Certainly, what he taught was not a denial of things that are timelessly sacred and eternally spiritual. Most certainly Buddha did not require a person to blindly obey and submit to him as a person possessing magical and supernatural powers whose directions if disobeyed would bring some kind of punishment or damnation upon those who defy his commandments!

What the Buddha taught was based on the uniform and orderly processes of causality, conditionality and interdependency subject to the facts of transiency in which "all things keep changing and never remained the same." He taught, therefore, that the thoughts, volitions, words and actions of human beings (karma), of natural necessity, were also subject to these uniform and orderly processes of causation and changing conditions in interdependency.

Karma, therefore, involves not only a given person's conscious and subliminal thoughts, feelings, wishes, wants, hopes and his innermost impulses and compulsions, but also, of causal necessity, entails their constantly changing supportive conditions without which a person's thoughts, words and deeds could not have emerged to bring about their consequent karmic effects and affects. You can plant a seed but it will not sprout without their supportive conditions such as the fertile soil, rain, sun, pollinating insects and so forth.

One's present karma in the making, therefore, is also even more dependent on one's past karma that have already activated what one presently is sensing, experiencing, saying and doing. However, said the Buddha, we are personally responsible for the very thoughts that we keep stubbornly clinging to in our minds and the

## MONTH'S THOUGHT



My concern about people asking for more advice on how to apply objectivist principles is that it might not be activism they are trying to practice, but passivism — relying on someone else to tell them how to do it.

Lindsay Perigo. *The Pitfall of Passivism.*



sentiments that we keep blindly cherishing in our hearts. For, in the end, we ourselves must personally suffer the direct and indirect consequences of what we have thought and intended that then became what we said and did, resulting in outcomes that are either painful, pleasurable or indifferent, or profitable or unprofitable.

The choices and decisions human beings make continue to trigger and infect the very things they keep saying and doing that continues to shackle them in repetitive acts of foolishness and

**SHINSHU KYOKAI MISSION**  
1631 S. Beretania St.  
Honolulu, HI 96826  
email: [skm@flex.com](mailto:skm@flex.com)  
website: [www.shinshukyokai.org](http://www.shinshukyokai.org)

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# REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SERVICES for FEBRUARY 2012

### 1st SUN FEB 5th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service  
Dharma Talk

**NIRVANA DAY**  
For Children and Adults  
Rev. Tatsuguchi

### 2nd SUN FEB 12th:

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

10.30 A.M.

**Annual  
General Membership Meeting  
and New Year Party**

### 3rd SUN FEB 19th:

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

### 4th SUN FEB 26th:

MONTHLY  
FAMILY WORSHIP  
Dharma Talk  
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

*With Deepest Sympathy*

Clark H. Shiraki 88yr Nov. 25, 2011

**THANK YOU**  
*for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!*

## 2012 Memorial Service Schedule

2011	1 Year	2010	3 Year	2006	7 Year
2000	13 Year	1996	17 Year	1988	25 Year
1980	33Year	1963	50 Year	1913	100 Year

continued on p. 8

pride. This is why human beings are creatures of habit. The very tone and feel of their voice emotionally affects others often in the most subtle of unseen ways that are most regretful. This is also true of the ocular cues and bodily gestures that also trigger what others say to us and how they physically fondle, caress, touch, manipulate things in reacting to the given situation.

Therefore, the unseen “vibrations” of our intentions in our minds and the secret “vibes” in our hearts, the things we say and do are either helpful and healing or hurtful and devastating. Unfortunately, more often than not, the things we say and do even with the best of intentions and generosity in the most unexpected of ways turn out to be regrettable often with consequences that cannot be reversed or rectified.

Therefore, when you leave those most crucial choices and decisions up to others, you become a person who depends on someone else to decide and choose what you should think, feel, choose, decide, say and do. You, thereby, become a person without a conscience who has surrendered her or his freedom and personhood to another person or some non-existent or imagined external authority. Simply put, this is how a person comes to invest unwarranted charismatic and spiritual powers to a cult leader or a founder of a new religion who claims to have god-like powers of omniscience and omnipotence.

Such mindless “persons” are “brainwashed followers” whose hearts have come under the complete control of a cult leader’s or a religion’s tenets and dogmas that are not to be questioned or challenged lest they suffer some kind of divine punishment or demonic damnation.

By contrast, a person who trusts and has taken refuge in the thought and vision of Amida Buddha’s Light of Selflessness and her Life of Togetherness becomes a person who knows and fully understands the reason as to why Shinran said: “I, Shinran, have never even once uttered

## WORDS OF SHINRAN

As for me, Shinran, there is nothing else except to believe, under the guidance of the Teaching of the Venerable Master [Honen], that, “We are saved by Amida merely through the Nembutsu alone. ... It is, however, entirely left to your choosing whether to accept and believe in the Nembutsu or to reject it. Ryukyo Fujimoto. *Shin Buddhism’s Essence: The Tannisho*. pp. 13, 14. [ ] mine.

the nembutsu for my father and mother” (T. Unno. *Tannisho*. Ch V. p. 10). Even more crucial for a person who believes in Amida’s Selflessness and Togetherness is for her or him to know the real reasons as to why the Shonin exclaimed: “As for myself, Shinran, I do not have a single disciple ...” (*op. cite*. Ch. VI. p.11). The reason why Shinran said these things was because the Dharma’s Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness are not the monopoly of any one man, race, culture, nation or religion, or any specific geographical site or point in history. The Dharma in other words, is not a commodity that can be canned, bottled or packaged to be marketed and sold.

The Truth of Dharma, therefore, is not a “dogma” that controls what people are to think, feel, say and do in expectation of a “reward” or in fear of some kind of “punishment.” Quite the contrary, the Dharma exposes to make naked the superstitions, illusions, false beliefs and unwarranted delusions that are “choking” a person’s mind to “suffocate” her or him with selfishness and her or his heart with unwarranted doubts, fears and anxieties that are imagined and imaginary that causes separations and conflicts between a person and others because of racial, social, cultural, occupational and religious differences.

The Dharma’s Selflessness appears as Amida’s Wisdom that unties the “knots” of superstitions, falsehoods, discriminations and misunderstandings that have been tied on the strands of one’s mind that shouldn’t have been “tied” there in the first place. The Dharma’s Togetherness appears as Amida’s Compassion that also unsnarls to untangle the “tangles” that are choking a person’s heart with jealousies, resentments and vanities that also shouldn’t be there in the first place.

GASSHO is the Monthly Newsletter of

SHINSHU KYOKAI MISSION of HAWAII

1631 S. Beretania Street, Honolulu, Hawaii,  
96826-1105. Temple 973-0150

Editor: Rev. R. K. Tatsuguchi

Circulation: SKM Staff

**PUBLICATION DATE: January 26, 2012**

That Amida, in “embracing” good persons “equally grasps” evil persons never to ever forsake or abandon either of them, especially the ones riddled by karmic evils, such a thought defies all common sense logic and reason. For human beings believe one-sidedly in rewarding only those who are law-abiding citizens while feeling justified in punishing those who are law breakers, even to summarily execute incorrigible criminals to rid society of them.

According to Shinran Shonin, this is why people:

... believe in their own power and practice good with a view toward bringing about their own deliverance lack the Faith that trusts solely in the Original Vow of Amida....

Ryukyo Fujimoto. *Shin Buddhism's Essence: The Tannisho*. Ch. III. p. 15.

Such persons, as mentioned in last month's GASSHO, are dualists because they perceive life in terms of discrete opposites that cannot be reconciled. Such as “good people” they think are to be “lauded” and “rewarded” while “evil people” are to be “castigated” if not utterly “obliterated.” Such people who see themselves as “good” and others “evil” forget that the sun shines equally on odious “weeds” as well as fragrant “flowers,” as well as “edible” and “inedible” fruits, without being partial to any one of them. So too, according to Buddha and Shinran, the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness in the form of Wisdom's Light shines on all sentient beings equally to embrace them all in its Togetherness to never abandon any one of them!

According to Shinran, the Dharma's Selflessness that manifests itself as Amida's Primal Vow of Boundless Togetherness is also Unconditional Compassion. “Therefore, ... it does not discriminate between ... good and evil ...” (T. Unno. *Tannisho*. Ch. I. p. 5). So too are the “six realms of transmigration” (*samsara* = the upper three heavenly realms in contrast with the lower three hellish existences below) equally, without exception, contained fully within the Pure Land of Amida (*Sukhavati*), which itself is embraced yet by the Dharma World's Greater Unlimited Boundlessness (*Nirvana* without any obstructions or residues = *mui-nehān*).

This Buddhist vision of Selfless Dharma can be envisioned to be an all-embracing three-in-one Truth and Actuality. Thus, this three-in-one Reality can be graphically depicted as a Boundless Sphere of Dharma that contains the Sphere of Countless

Buddhas and the myriad spheres of sentient beings that as a Sphere that is “one and yet distinctly three,” and in being “distinctly three” are yet “inseparably one” as well. The three spheres are one and of the same essence of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness.

This explains as to why, how and from whence:

Amida established His Vow out of His Compassion for those who are full of sin and evil and are unable to set themselves free from *samsara* by any other practice. Since the purpose of His Vow is to **transform** the evil-doer into a Buddha, the very evildoer who has Faith in Amida's Power [to save him] is especially blessed with being in possession of the real cause of Rebirth in the Pure Land. R. Fujimoto. *op. cite.*, in bold to emphasize that faith in Shin Buddhism is a process of “transformation,” not a “conversion.”

Amida, therefore, mysteriously keeps freely appearing in the minds and hearts of sentient beings as a “voiceless voice” in the “formless form” of his Sacred Name resounding with the assurance: “I will never abandon or forsake you!”

This is how and why any “sentient being” who trusts and takes refuge in Amida's “voiceless voice” comes naturally to respond and begins to utter *Namoh Amida Butsu* in gratitude, humility, especially a heartfelt penitence. In this way, Amida's power of Wisdom and her virtues of Compassion “transform” a person's impertinence into humility, ingratitude into gratitude and defiance into penitence, a penitence that paradoxically bring Great Joy, Calm and Serenity that permeate her or his whole being, “a World in which the sounds of two sticks striking each other are not heard.”

For this very reason Sakyamuni Buddha's visualizations of Amida Buddha in the *Larger, Meditation* and *Amida* Sutras are not to be equated to the visions of a God who created the first man in his own image who then distinguished to set apart his descendants as his “chosen people” to distinguish them from those who are “bad” or “evil” who then are to be rejected and cast out!

All “-isms,” in one way or another, are “dualisms.” For they sever the living connections between one's “mind” from one's “heart” such as in the belief that one's “soul” is pure and autonomous because it is a pure spirit independent of one's defiled “body” full of carnality, lust and sensuality.

The Eightfold Path, on the other hand, indicates that one's thoughts, feelings, words and actions are inseparable and interconnected to one's mind, anatomy and conscience. The problem with an "-ism" like Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism or that they arise from man's sense of self in terms of her or his "spiritual ego" that sets him or her above and distinct from the rest of animal creation to be without a conscience. This sense of self also sets one human being apart from another who she or he sees as a "non-believer" or heathen, or pagan who is primitive, backward and ungodly.

The reason why this is so is because human beings are conditioned by the likes and dislikes of their race and culture that they are born into. They constantly are choosing between what they see as "desirable" from what they see to be "undesirable" in terms of their gender, ethnicity and the religion they were brought up in. They are also constantly seeking after what is "pleasurable" and "enjoyable" as they desperately try to avoid what are "aversive" and "painful" as does any other human being. In doing so, they fail to realize that even the very "enjoyable" things of their lives will end in despair, disappointments and much heartaches. Such a "heartbreak" is especially experienced when one unexpectedly loses a lifelong loved one to death. This is also the same for "unforeseen" misfortunes or calamities that suddenly befall one without any warning like a bolt of lightning out of the clear blue sky!

That the Buddha understood these facts of life is explicitly indicated by his words as follows:

All fear punishment. To all men life is dear. Judging others by yourself, **slay not, neither cause to slay.**

He who hurts a creature which seeks for happiness will not find it for himself.

*loc. cite., Dhmmppda* No. 8. p. 164. Bold for focal emphasis.

Unfortunately, in the minds of human beings a constant battle rages to the death between "demons" and "angels," "sinners" and "saints," and so forth endlessly. Such imagined "divisiveness" ignores the real battle that is raging deep within a person's heart of hearts (subconscious and unconscious being). So it is quite misleading to label what the Buddha taught as being an "-ism" such as has led many erroneously to conclude that what the Buddha taught is nothing more than a nihilism, pessimism, fatalism or like other "-isms," such as atheism, skepticism, agnosticism, and so forth.

## SHINRAN'S WASAN

How regretful that in  
our Land of Yamato,  
Both monks and laity  
relying on miraculous  
and supernatural signs  
Keep praying to petition  
the gods of earth  
and celestial deities!

*SHOZOMATSU WASAN* No. 104  
rkt trans.

In Buddhism the seeming conflicting opposites are likened to the spherical earth rotating on its axis in the light of day and the darkest of nights as though the rotating earth under sunlight and moonlight were two distinct, different, separate planets, one bright and the other dark. In Buddhism the worlds of light and darkness are seen as "interdependent" and "inseparable" one from the other. Both the full moon and the sun, in actuality, are both illuminating the one and same earth, one side in the light of day and the other side by moonlight in the night's darkness.

The inseparability and connectedness of flora and fauna on this earth is also likened to this inseparable interrelationship between the sun as the source of life giving light which in turn is reflected by the moon as a "golden luminosity" in the dark of night bringing forth all kinds of nocturnal forms of life. The earth itself with all that is above, below, all around and in it remains the selfsame spherical planet whether one side is in sunlight or the other in moonlight (*ko-myo* = "sunlight" and "moonlight," together).

Furthermore, what lies beyond the visible blue of the skies during the light of day and beyond the moon and the stars in the night darkness, the skies seen in daylight or the skies seen in the night, they are all of the same skies in the one and same universe that is the Great Unknown Beyond. They are the same sky from anywhere on the face of this earth you might be looking up at it whether in daylight or moonlight.

The "looking" is sensory, one-directional and empirical, the "realization" that they are one and the same is intuitive, and spiritually all-embracing. This vision of the visible and non-visible cosmos

suggests that the universe itself is a boundless sphere of Oneness (*Ichinyo*) that is beyond human comprehension, and, therefore, unknowable and unfathomable, no matter how far one tries to see and empirically probe into any one of its "ten endless directions." To "see" that the universe and all that is in it is a boundless sphere of sacredness and spirituality, this is to experience the "awakening" and "realization" of what is true and real faith!

This vision of Oneness was stated by Master Shan'tao as follows:

... Sakyamuni, Amida, and the Buddhas in the ten quarters, all with the same mind, are no more apart from sentient beings than things. Hence it is that Sakyamuni rejoices in the person of shinjin, saying, "He is my true companion." The person of shinjin [a person who has trusted and taking refuge in the Truth of Selflessness and Actuality of Togetherness] is the true disciple of the Buddha; he is the one who abides in right-mindedness. Since he has been grasped never to be abandoned, he is said to have attained the diamond-like heart. He is called "the best among the best, the excellent person," "the wonderfully excellent person," "the finest of people," "the truly rare person." Such a person has become established in the stage of the truly settled. ... This means that he will necessarily be born in the true and real Buddha Land. SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 2. pp. 24, 25. [ ] mine.

These words of Shan'tao clearly indicate that the World of Dharma has and continues to equally embrace all things and beings without favoritisms, condemnations or rejections. This is why living and non-living things have and continue yet to emerge and return to the very source they came from as spawned by unseen forces that yet are stirring the visible material elements and necessary supportive conditions that also are uniformly governed by the orderly laws of causality, conditionality and interdependency.

Since all elemental things, creatures and human beings exist and are living in the same Cosmic Sphere that is without limits, and since all things and life forms are permeated by the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness, all things and beings are illuminated constantly by Amida's Light of Wisdom and embraced by her Life of Compassion. This is exactly why Shinran said:

You should know that this shinjin [which is to have trusted and taken complete refuge in the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness] is bestowed through the compassionate means of Sakyamuni, Amida, and all the Buddhas in the ten quarters.

*ibid.* [ ] mine for clarifying significance of what is meant by faith in Jodoshinshu.

Here, once again, we see in these words of Shinran concerning the significance of Sakyamuni, Amida, and Dharma in our lives.

This is why Shinran admonished:

... you should not disparage the teachings of other Buddhas or the people who perform good acts other than nembutsu. Neither should you despise those who scorn and slander people of nembutsu; rather you should have compassion and care for them. This was Honen's teaching. *ibid.*

Concerning Amida's Unconditional Compassion for all beings, Shinran said,

... Truly know, therefore, **that without any differentiating between good and bad people, and regardless of one's having a heart of blind passion, all beings are certain to attain birth** [in the Pure Land] ... *loc. cite.*, pp. 23, 24. [ ] mine. Bold for emphasis.

Do not these words of Shinran indicate that Sakyamuni's sermons based on his visions and visualizations of Amida's Compassion for all beings is not an "-ism" that is exclusivist or elitist such as found in God's declaration in the Old Testament that the ancestors of Abraham as traced back to the first man Adam are people created in his very image. His descendants, therefore, are his "chosen" and "elect" people especially through Abraham's son Isaac and his descendants. (See Deut. 7:6; also 1 Peter 2:9, etc.)

By contrast, what the Buddha taught concerning Amida was not based on such ethnocentric sentiments favoring a given race of people to set them apart or in opposition against other people who were profiled to be an "evil people" and the enemies of the God of Israel who are to be vanquished and eliminated in some kind of struggle to the death in the name of some kind of supreme deity's divine justice! (See Deut. 20:10-18). Is this not the very underlying moral, theological as well as the geo-political basis that rationalizes and justifies all wars where the bigger

fish consume the “smaller fish”?

Therefore, let us as Jodoshinshu Buddhists reflect and ponder on the words of Shinran Shonin concerning the Dharma’s Truth of Selflessness and Togetherness as manifest in the formless forms of Amida’s Inconceivable Light and Immeasurable Life that embraces all things and life forms in the Dharma’s Selflessness and Togetherness as follows:

O Buddha, the wisdom of immeasurable light, whose body is like a mountain of gold, I now in body, speech and thought, join hands and bow my head in worship! ...

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. Contemplating the power of the Buddha’s Primal Vow, I see that no one who encounters it passes by in vain; it quickly brings to fullness and perfection. The great treasure ocean of virtues. SBT-Series. *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*. pp. 88-89.

Note the key phrases “.... also takes others across ...” indicating that the Dharma is universal and all-inclusive, and therefore, not exclusive to a given chosen people or race!

This is the reason why, Shinran in his *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling* concerning the uttering of Nembutsu said: “When one realizes true and real shinjin, one is immediately grasped and held within the heart of the Buddha of unhindered light, never to be abandoned” (p. 33), for Amida embraces all sentient beings without discrimination or exclusions.

Then, in his *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone*, Shinran stated further:

The holy Name of the Tathagata surpasses measure, description, and conceptual understanding; it is the name of the Vow embodying great love and great compassion which **brings all sentient beings into supreme nirvana**. The Name of the Buddha surpasses the names of all the other Tathagatas for it is based on the Vow to save all beings. (p. 30. In bold for focal emphasis.)

Clearly, Amida’s Light and Life are not the exclusive property or monopoly of human beings alone.

To avail ourselves of the powers and virtues of Amida’s Vows that are manifestations of the Dharma’s Selflessness and Togetherness for all sentient beings, we should, said Shinran,

... abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self, to stop reflecting knowingly on one’s evil heart, and further to abandon the judging of people as good and bad. When such shackled beings ... thus wholly entrust themselves to the Name embodying great wisdom, the inconceivable Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, then while burdened as they are with blind passion, they attain the supreme nirvana. “Shackled” describes us, who are bound by all our various blind passion. Blind passion refers to pains which torment the body and afflictions which distress the heart and mind.... (p. 40)

These words of Shinran clearly indicate that the teachings of Jodoshinshu are based on the most important teaching of Sakyamuni that were based on his “visualizations” of Amida Buddha’s Unconditional Compassion for all beings that were especially directed to the person hopelessly riddled by karmic transgressions due to her or his desecrations and disparagements of the Dharma, or things sacred and spiritual.

The Ultimate All-embracing Vow of Amida, therefore, concerns not only the liberation of “good persons” but especially the “emancipation” of each and every person hopelessly riddled by karmic evils. This is why Amida’s “voiceless voice” of Selflessness and Togetherness keeps forever reminding man that he is not the overlord over the rest of creation that he keeps devastating and desecrating. The powers and virtues of Amida’s “voiceless voice” resounds from deep within” as his Sacred Name.

When Amida’s Name is voiced by a person his defiance is mysteriously transformed into humility and his desecrations into penitence. It is the “voiceless voice” of Amida that keeps resounding in a person’s being that finally becomes a person’s eternal prayer that “all beings, wherever they are, whether they be in the past or in present or yet to be born in the future, will all be truly joyous, happy and safe wherever they may be!” This is how a person’s “everyday consciousness” comes to be transformed into his “spiritual consciousness,” which is much like the “bitterness” in a green persimmon being constantly turned into its very “sweetness.” This transformative process is a “nurturing” and “awakening” process, not an

“incinerating” one that reduces evil things and bad persons into the ashes or “nothingness” or “meaninglessness.”

## **BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES**

Buddha replied: “Our thinking is gone, but our thoughts continue. Reasoning ceases, but knowledge remains.”

Said Kutadanta: “How is that? Is not reasoning and knowledge the same?”

The Blessed one explained the distinction by an illustration: “It is as when a man wants, during the night, to send a letter, and, after having his clerk called, has a lamp lit, and gets the letter written. Then, when that has been done, he extinguishes the lamp. But though the writing has been finished and the light has been put out the letter is still there. Thus does reasoning cease and knowledge remain; and in the same way mental activity ceases, but the experience, wisdom, and all the fruits of our acts the consequences of (what we have thought, intended, said and done) endure.”

Paul Carus. *The Gospel of the Buddha*. pp. 154-155. ( ) mine.

## **QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER**

QUESTION: Is not bowing to any statue of Amida and reciting *Na-mo A-mi-da Butsu* as one worships a “graven image” of Amida or his Sacred Name really idol worship?”

ANSWER: Yes and no. If one is bowing to an “image” of Amida and “repeats” his Name as an invocation or a supplication for some kind of supernatural intervention, magical healing or personal advantages, then that is “worshipping” an idol!

Because the Buddhists of his day were praying to Amida and invoking his Name for such worldly things and benefits, Shinran said: “While their outward form accords with Buddhism, [they] inwardly revere and practice other teachings” (*Shozomatsu Wasan*. from Ryukoku Trans. Series VII. No. 100. p. 100. [ ] mine).

Shinran, however, realized that reciting Amida’s Name *Namoh-amida-butsu* can be nothing more than a person’s expression of her or his heartfelt trust, gratitude and indebtedness to Amida for her Great Promise not to abandon, forsake or reject anyone, especially one’s karma riddled person full of transgressions and desecrations of the Dharma.

**Annual  
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING  
and  
NEW YEAR PARTY  
February 12, 2012  
10:30 AM**