



GASSHO

March
2012

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



DECISIONS AND CHOICES ONLY YOU CAN MAKE

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

In this issue I will quote *Dhammapada* verses dealing with *karma* or a person's unseen thoughts, feelings and cravings born of a person's desires, passions and vanities that keep triggering what a person audibly says and does that affect herself or himself and others.

A newborn baby begins to be conditioned by the five kinds of sensations that are pleasurable or painful. As the infant begins responding to what is pleasurable and painful, she or he begins to develop personal "likes" and "dislikes." As a newborn becomes a toddler and then a child, she or he continues to be unaware of how and why the things she or he says or does the things that she or he has done bring either pleasure or pain to others as well.

In becoming an adolescent and then a teenager, she or he continues to experience vague instinctive stirrings and intuitive feelings in her or his sub-consciousness and dreams. As an exuberant young adult, she or he continues to fail in grasping the real reasons as to why she or he keeps thinking, feeling, expecting, saying and doing the same things over and over out of sheer habit. As a result, the most unimaginable of things happen that are most tragically sorrowful and regretful. Then, on the other hand, there are times when the most unexpected heroic of acts are made by people least expected to do so! Therefore, depending on the intent of one's thoughts and motives, what one says and does in a given situation result in outcomes that are either laudable or detestable.

Therefore, what is going on unseen in our minds and secretly stirring in our hearts keep triggering the very things we say and do to each other in each passing moment of our lives. This is because whatever we say and do springs from our innermost thoughts and unseen volitions. This

MONTH'S THOUGHT



I have found that great people do have an immense belief in themselves and their mission. They also have great determination as well as an ability to work hard. At the crucial moment of decision, they draw on their accumulated wisdom. Above all, they have integrity. Yousuf Karsh (1908-2002), Turkish-Canadian photographer and journalist.



undeniable fact was stated several centuries ago by Sakyamuni Buddha as follows:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts; it is made up of our thoughts. *Dhammapada* No. 1 p. 15.

This is why our inner unseen thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes, motives, compulsions, assumptions, presumptions, likes, dislikes that are constantly

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR MARCH 2012

1st SUN Mar 4th:

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

2nd SUN Mar 11th:

Spring O'Higan Service

9 A.M. Eng. Service

Guest Speaker:

Rev. Shigeaki Fujitani

3rd SUN Mar 18th:

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

3rd SUN Mar 25th:

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

2012 Memorial Service Schedule

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

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

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

With Deepest Sympathy

Mrs. Margaret S. Yoshida 82yr Jan.15, 2012
Mrs. Yoshiko Ota 98yr Jan. 22, 2012
Mrs. Yoshiko Toi 73yr Feb. 1, 2012
Mrs. Shizuko Hirata 90yr Feb. 13, 2012

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stirring in our deepest selves need to be examined and reflected upon even before they are triggered to become the things we say and do.

This is why Sakyamuni Buddha said:

If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness, like a shadow, never leaves him.
ibid.

Sakyamuni Buddha also said,

Those who mistake false for true and true for false, their abode is wrong mindedness — they arrive not at the true.
Those who know true as true and false as false, their abode is right-mindedness — these arrive at the true. *ibid.*

This is exactly why the Noble Eightfold Path begins with Right Thought (or Thinking) based on Right Knowing (or Knowledge illuminated by the Dharma's Selfless Wisdom and All-embracing Compassion) that lights up to illumine the way to Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood and Right Perseverance that "enables" a person to Rightly Reflect on one's self as laid bare and naked through what is the Right Contemplation of the *Dharma's* Wisdom Light of Selflessness and its Compassionate Life of Togetherness, or what is the Light and Life of Amida's Wisdom and Compassion.

The *karma* of individuals as well as that of a group of individuals are also governed by the impartial orderly and uniform processes of causation, conditionality and interdependency that apply equally to all things and forms of life throughout the entire "ten directions" of the cosmos. This is why the thoughts, sentiments, words and actions of each person are also affected and impacted by the constantly cumulating collective effect of the thoughts, feelings, words and actions of countless individuals through the web of their bio-genetic-psycho-physical connections to their countless ancestral parents, brothers and sisters. The reality that the lives as we are presently living

WORDS OF SHINRAN

... Truly know ... that without differentiation between good and bad people and regardless of one's having a heart of blind passion, all beings are certain to attain birth.
... *Letters of Shinran*, No 2. pp. 23, 24

now are also connecting to the lives of those who are yet to be born, who then will become brothers and sisters, husbands, wives, and finally fathers, mothers, as well as their children yet to be born in the future testimony to what is the seamless reality of past, present and future *karma*.

Each moment of our lives as we are living it is also unrepeatable and irreplaceable. Each moment of life for this reason is most precious and sacred because it can never be retrieved or relived once again. This is why the lives of all sentient things as well as that of non-sentient things are equally sacred, spiritual and are to be so revered. These then are the underlying reasons for living a life of *ahimsa* (non-violence) as advocated by the *Dharmic* religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, etc.).

The Buddhist precept "to refrain from killing" is based on the perception that all things and forms of life are sacred and spiritual. Therefore, the five precepts from this perspective of non-violence are not the commandments of a Supreme Deity whose divine will, if disobeyed, entails the fear of being condemned by the wrath of his omniscient and omnipotent powers.

Therefore, *anitya* (transiency) does not mean that because one's life is transitory it is an arbitrary, imaginary or fictional matter. *Anitya* does not mean that each passing moment of life is of no value and not worth living.

The fact is that all of existence is "contingent" and "dependent" on other things that are also changing. This actuality, however, does not mean that each passing moment of life is not worth living. *Anitya* means that each form of life and circumstance are like the rolling waves that are constantly "appearing" and "disappearing" on the surface of the ocean. Our thoughts and feelings also are like the waves constantly "emerging from" and "returning back" into the depths of the unfathomable ocean from whence they originally

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came. This then is the significance of the Buddhist phrase, "ceaseless births and deaths" meaning that life is like the waves constantly arising and subsiding from the very waters and currents of the ocean whose essence is H₂O which is also the very substance of each wave that appears and disappears on the ocean's surface.

This comparison of countless forms of life to waves constantly "appearing" and "disappearing" helps us to grasp and explain the difference between what is meant by "reincarnation" and "transmigration." Reincarnation is based on the belief that one has an "intact autonomous soul" (or an "unchanging self") that has entered to reside in one's body ever since its conception in a mother's womb. The newly conceived body then must be born, grow, age and finally die to become nothing more than the dust of the earth, or "the whitish grey of bones and ashes." The "soul" then leaves the body upon its death and wanders about until it takes up residence in another new body at the moment of its conception in another mother's womb. What new body form the "soul" takes on depends on its past karma. Such then is the notion of an "autonomous soul" in reincarnation.

One may imagine such an "independent soul" to be a "ghost-like entity" comparable to the unseen energy and force that has energized and is moving each wave that has risen and begins to roll on and on upon the ocean's surface until it finally subsides. The belief in such an "eternal soul" as explained in reincarnation, instead, in transmigration is seen as the unseen forces and energies in the ocean's flowing waters and under currents that has become the very energy and force animating each set and subsequent set of waves that keep appearing and disappearing into the ocean itself. The energy and force in a wave is the same with that of the ocean.

In transmigration, each set of waves is distinct and different from that of the others but the forces and energies in them are the same. The difference being that in the notion of transmigration, the water's energy that is the force that is flowing in each wave set comes from the ocean itself. In reincarnation the force and energy in one set of waves are seen to be distinct, different and independent from that of the next wave that follows it. They are also not connected to the energy and force of the ocean. The waters and currents, therefore, in each wave then also are not the same waters and currents in the preceding or following wave after. Each wave keeps disappearing, but the force and energy that was in each wave keep

emerging thereafter intact and unchanged in another set of waves. In transmigration the force and energy in each wave are identical with the energies and forces of the ocean. Therefore, each wave itself is but a momentary existence whose essence of H₂O is also the very essence of the ocean's waters and currents that are H₂O.

This analogy of transmigration to waves significantly differs from that of reincarnation in which it is believed that one's "soul" is autonomous and intact and is permanent entity. According to reincarnation, whether one's soul will be reborn "high caste" or "low caste" or an animal, this all depends on one's past karma. However, in the analogy of transmigration to waves, we are enabled to see and appreciate the connection between past, present and future *karma* as being a seamless process over timeless time and spaceless space in which countless past lives are affecting future lives through present lives (all waves) because all things are interconnected and therefore inseparable. This is what Shinran also meant when he said "we have all been fathers and mothers as well as brothers and sisters over seamless time and space."

When suffering is seen through the "self-centered" lens of reincarnation where one's "spiritual ego" is seen in terms of a "me only" or a "mine only" mentality based on the premise that "I am" so "I exist," in the mistaken notion and presumption that there will always be a tomorrow "for me" arises. It should be clear by now that when Sakyamuni said "life is full of suffering" he was not saying that "a person does not exist" or that a person's life is "of no significance" because it is only a mirage, or like a dream, which is not what he said or meant!

The misunderstanding that *anatman* means there is no "self" that exists arises because there were and still are disparagers and detractors of what the Buddha taught, who either blatantly or in the most subtle of ways misconstrue the term *nirvana* to be the literal "extinction of self." Then they also negatively misconstrue the related term *anatman* as meaning that the "self" as the Buddha taught it, is merely an illusion because he is said to have said that the person does not actually exist, which again is not what Sakyamuni actually said or meant.

As of consequence, Buddhism, as already mentioned, came to be characterized by early European colonialists and Christian missionaries to be nothing more than a nihilism or a fatalism, because it taught the denial of personality, personhood and the existence of a God given soul.

The impression given was that Buddhists are “disengaged” from the realities of everyday life like those homeless ascetics high on a mountain top or in the remotest of valleys who have renounced and abandoned the ways of the world to live as hermits in meditative self absorption until they became no more, a “non-entity.”

Dukkha is not a scientific hypothesis or a moralistic judgment. Nor is *nirvana* or *anatman* a philosophical proposition or a religious doctrine to be debated in some kind of oratorical contest where only one of the orators is declared the “winner” while the others are declared the “losers.” Buddhism is not a chess tournament or a football game in which one’s opponents are to be overcome or annihilated if one is to be victorious and triumphant. When life is set up in such oppositional, adversarial and warring contexts, such as between “angels” and “demons” or “saints” and “sinners,” life then, as of consequence, becomes a literal battlefield for survival in which the strongest, the fittest and the most cunning and devious get to survive, in which the winner, in having outsmarted and eliminated his opponents, takes all the booty as the victor while the losers are left desolate, destitute and devastated, if not obliterated.

The reality, nevertheless, is that all forms of life, once conceived, are then born completely naked and without a thing, to then grow, age and finally, once again, become completely naked and without a thing, then to pass on into the Great Unknown Beyond to continue their upward spiritual journey. This fact of life once again, can be likened to the endless sets of waves rising from and returning to the very waters and currents of the ocean, only to keep rising and subsiding from the ocean from which they originally emerged to then return again until they reach the shores of nirvana or the Pure Land.

Prince Siddhartha, in encountering illness, old age and a corpse, came to realize that life is plagued even further by man’s collective blatant transgressions and desecrations of things eternally sacred and timelessly spiritual. Especially was he struck by the actuality that for one’s self to survive and live on, of necessity, one had to feed on the countless lives of innocent creatures as well as on the vulnerable things of the environment. To “awaken” to this actuality is to become “aware” that life is full of anguish, regrets and remorse due to man’s collective mindless wastefulness and blatant excessiveness characterized by a woman’s or a man’s greed, avarice, jealousies, especially as justified by her or his self vanities, even at the very

SHINRAN’S WASAN

Due to the fault of doubting
Buddha’s Power of Wisdom,
Such a person consequently
is mired in the areas
that border the Pure Land!
Endlessly he remains there
due to his apprehensions,
uncertainty and doubts!
Shosomatsu Wasan No. 63
rtk trans.

expense of their fellow human beings and living environments.

Upon coming face to face with these undeniable facts concerning human beings, Prince Siddhartha fell into a deep despair and depression. The weight of life’s contradictions and paradoxes began to weigh heavily on his sensitive person, especially on his conscience. For he began to see, in his own person and privileged lifestyle, the direct and indirect causes that were responsible for the pain and suffering of countless innocent creatures and fellow human beings (like the lifestyles of the famous and rich derived from the exploitation and at the expense of countless human beings by depriving them of what is rightfully theirs). Especially did the Prince become despondent at the thought of losing his beloved wife, son, father King, and next of kin to the inevitability of death. He already had lost his birth mother some seven days after his birth.

This is why it was most fortunate that the Prince happened to see a clear-eyed mendicant completely at peace with himself, full of serenity and blissfulness. For if Siddhartha the Prince had not seen this homeless *sramana* he most likely would have never set out as he did to seek the life of quietude and nonviolence based on the Truth of Selflessness and its actuality of Togetherness. He probably would not have sat under a tree to persevere for some five to six years until he attained enlightenment. I have also compared this process of becoming “awake” to be like the “bitterness” in a green persimmon being gradually transformed into its very “sweetness” by power of sunlight and its warming, mellowing virtues. Such a ripening process does not, I said, incinerate the persimmon into ashes or turn it into a pumpkin or something else. This is also the meaning of the saying: “eggplants do not grow on cucumber vines.”

According to Walpola Rahula in his *What The Buddha Taught*, the concept of suffering can be viewed from three perspectives: Suffering "as ordinary suffering," suffering "produced by change," and finally, suffering as a result of "conditioned states." Rahula, therefore, explains that there are:

All kinds of suffering in life like birth, old age, sickness, death, association with unpleasant persons and conditions, separation from beloved ones and pleasant conditions, not getting what one desires, grief, lamentation, distress — all such forms of physical and mental suffering, which are universally accepted as suffering and pain, are included in *dukkha* as ordinary suffering.... p. 19.

These eight categories of everyday suffering refer just to the sensate and perceptual forms of psychosomatic pain and anguish that human beings undergo and experience as long as their hearts are pulsating and their lungs are inhaling and exhaling the breath of life. These eight forms of psychosomatic pain and anguish alone are sufficient to show that life in its sensual subjective mode is full with all kinds of physical, mental and emotional distress. Life is also full of moral and ethical contradictions and religious paradoxes that plague all of mankind in their social, economic and political transactions.

Now, the teachings, principles, practices and the enlightenment that the Buddha expounded upon are not merely based on one specific "cause" to one specific "effect" connections. Nor does what the Buddha taught conflict with the findings of modern quantum physics' four-dimensional premises concerning cosmic reality as being a multiplex network of complex interconnecting causes and effects within their complex networks of supportive conditions in which specific one-cause-to-one-effect, linear phenomena seem to occur. Cause and effect relationships must not be seen only in their linear one-way connections but also in their multi-linear connections as well as in their multiplex supportive conditions. These multi-dimensional and multiplex relationships, whether microscopic or macroscopic, are also implied by the terms "conditionality" and "interdependency" that need to be considered in addition to the mere linear connections that are commonly perceived by and limited to the senses.

Buddhism, therefore, in focusing on the facts of a person's personal *karma* also focuses on the collective *karma* of countless others over past,

present and future that are seamlessly connected. Now human activity, or *karma*, as the major world religions propose, is based on the tendency to place man all alone high on a pedestal above the rest of all creation because he is believed to be the only one to have been given an "autonomous soul." Such a notion or belief on the part of man to regard himself or themselves as being the most significant moral and spiritual entity in the universe and on the face of this earth, this suggests an unwarranted "spiritual egoism" based on the presumption that human beings alone have a God given right to the pursuit of freedom, liberty and happiness, while the rest of creation has been relegated to be mere items to be exploited and used by man for his own personal advantage, benefit, gain and profit.

In a sense, *karma* transcends time and space because one's present thoughts, words and deeds, in being connected to each other, are also being affected by the thoughts, words and deeds of individuals over the countless past generations. What man individually and collectively has thought, felt, said and done over the countless past generations, as mentioned, continues to affect and effect what is even now occurring in the present. These consequences effect the present and in turn affect and effect what people in the future will be thinking, saying and doing. For these very reasons, a person needs to be morally responsible and spiritually awake as a concerned member of society concerning how one's present *karma* is affected by the past and how his present behaviors will be affecting the future. To be a concerned human being, a person needs then to be accountable for the consequences for her or his choices and decisions being made in the present, and be responsible for what she or he has thought, felt, said and done in each passing moment of her or his present life.

For, as mentioned, the consequences of what we have said and done become irreversible. The crucial choices and decisions a person makes whether they be sensual, intellectual, emotional, moral, ethical or spiritual, they all bring about their respective consequences into our present lives as well as future lives. Indeed, a person's decisions and choices determine whether she or he will be a person who is moral or immoral, humane or inhumane, helpful or hurtful, and so on. The fact is that only the person herself or him-self can make such crucial choices and decisions as a person of conscience. Therefore the age-old adage: "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink!"

The following *Dhammapada* verses explain why the facts of *karma* as governed by the uniform and orderly principles of causality, conditionality and interdependency are not the property or monopoly of any one person, race, culture, religion, geographic site or point in historical time. The reason, said Sakymuni Buddha, is because:

All the Buddhas teach the same truth. They point out the Path to those who go astray. To cease from evil; to cultivate the good; to cleanse our thoughts; to help others. This is the teaching of the Buddhas. *Dhammapada* No 4. p. 157.

This is why, Sakyamuni Buddha said:

The signs of true religions are good will, love, truthfulness, purity, nobility, and goodness. Best of paths is the Eightfold Path; best of truths are the Four Holy Truths. Best of states is dispassion; best of men is the man of vision. *Dhammapada* No 3. p. 155.

Vision here means the ability to contemplate things that are eternally sacred and to "en-vision" spiritual truths that are timeless. Which is to be "enabled" to see and revere the things of life with gratitude, humility, especially with a heartfelt penitence. To be so enabled to do so is to express one's profound indebtedness full of commiseration and compassion as awakened by the thought and visions of Amida Buddha's constant Light of Selflessness that never forsakes any sentient being by embracing them all in the Life of Togetherness full of Compassion without any condemnations or rejections.

In Jodoshinshu, penitence, as of consequence, is a heartfelt remorse and commiseration for the countless lives that have and continue to be taken so that one's own life as well as that of others can continue to live on from day to day. Such a "penitence" is not to be confused with the "repentance" that is called for as a public testimonial such as that displayed at a revival meeting or as a confession to a priest in the privacy of a confessional box. Penitence in Jodoshinshu is characterized by a sincere, heartfelt remorse concerning one's own failings and shortcomings full of regrets for what one has thought, said and done that were wrong and hurtful, especially those that cannot be rectified and reversed.

Therefore, penitence in Jodoshinshu is to endure and bear the inevitable *karmic* consequences, painful as they may be, that have to run their

natural course until all their negative energy and force runs out like the flame burning on the wick of a candle until the candle's wax melting and fueling the flame finally runs out. Therefore, to the best of our ability, we must refrain from intentionally setting things on fire like an arsonist by living the life of nonviolence as we, all the while, endure and bear the consequences of our mental, emotional, linguistic and physical transgressions and desecrations until their energy burns out!

Therefore, paradoxically, penitence in Jodoshinshu is to accept the actuality that one is undeniably a mere mortal burning with passions and vanities until the last breath of one's life. While being sorrowful and remorseful a simultaneous "transformation," paradoxically, is taking place as one is enduring the karmic consequences of one's arrogance and presumptions that have filled one's whole being with a remorse like the "bitterness" in a green persimmon being transformed into its "sweetness." The persimmon in being "transformed" is not being incinerated or is it being "converted" into a banana or an orange. It is still the persimmon it can only be, only now one that is turning into a "ripe" one to finally become a mellow one.

This distinction between Jodoshinshu "awakening" and being "born again" in Christianity is to be differentiated by the terms "transformation" and "conversion." This difference needs to be clarified and made very clear. For in Jodoshinshu, "awakening" is about a person's *karma* being "transformed" and not about being nullified, obliterated or incinerated. Being "born again" in Christianity entails the belief that "one's sins have been washed away" and have been converted to "become purified as white as snow." (See: Psalms 51:7, Isaiah 1:18, and (KJB) Rev. 1:5 — "washed us from our sins in his own blood.") This difference between "transformation" and "conversion" is also illustrated as the difference between "untying" and "cutting off" "knots" on a length of rope. The "untying" does not cut the rope into two opposing parts, but the cutting does. The untying does not cut out the "knots" but the "cutting" does. In being "cut" the rope no longer is one rope but several pieces of rope!

Buddha, therefore, urged the people as follows,

After you have learned the Doctrine, let your purified hearts find delight in bringing forth corresponding deeds.

Liberality, courtesy, good will, and unselfishness — these are to the world what

the linchpin is to the chariot.

The good things of this world pass away, but the treasures earned through righteous living are imperishable and never pass away.

op. cite, p. 154.

Being aware of the fact that the consequences of *karma* are irreversible, Sakyamuni cautioned us all as follows:

Beware of the anger of the mind and control thy mind! Leave the sins of the mind and practice virtue with thy mind.

The wise who control their **body**, the wise who control their **tongue**, the wise who control their **mind**, are indeed well controlled. *Dhammapada* No. 4. Praises of Buddha pp. 156-157. Bold to point out inseparable relationship between one's actions and words as triggered by the thoughts in one's mind.

By understanding the dynamics and interplay between one's thoughts, words, actions and how one's *karmic* past affects the present to affect what then occurs in the future, we become "empowered" and "enabled" by Amida's Wisdom and her virtues of Compassion to see how and why what is presently going on in one's mind and stirring in the depths of one's heart have become, are becoming and yet will become the very things we have said and done and yet keep becoming what we say and do that keep affecting our present lives as well as the lives of those who are yet to be born and yet to live in the ever unfolding future.

Such the thought and vision of being grasped by the Truth of Selflessness and embraced by its Reality of Togetherness is obtained only through the Right Contemplation of the Dharma manifesting itself in the "formless form" of Amida Buddha's Infinite Wisdom's Light and her Immeasurable Compassionate Life that forever has and keeps grasping to embrace all sentient beings without discriminations, condemnations or rejections. In fact, according to Sakyamuni, all the Buddhas over past, present and future in the "ten endless directions" of the universe have, are and yet keep tirelessly grasping and embracing all sentient beings, both good and evil without any exclusions, this is beyond all human understanding. They will be doing so until the last sentient being, especially the ones riddled by *karmic* evils, have been "transformed" into a Buddha.

Therefore, to be so grasped by the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and embraced within its Reality of Togetherness, this is to have been

empowered to become a person who, to the best of his limited ability, keeps striving to be compassionate and not cruel; conciliatory and not conflictive; respectful and not condescending; doubtless and not doubtful; excelling and not excessive; faithful and not faithless; fearless and not fearful; forgiving and not unforgiving; healing and not hurtful; imaginative and not imaginary; inspiring and not instigating; joyful and not jealous; merciful and not merciless; mindful and not mindless; selfless and not selfish; sensible and not senseless; sighted and not sightless; and so on, endlessly.

Shinran entrusted himself to Amida as a person fully aware of his *karma* riddled self. Such a person has become permeated through and through with the thought of Amida Buddha (*nembutsu*) because she or he has become fully established in the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness as constantly manifest in Amida's Vows of Unconditional Compassion. This is what the Power of Another is all about. This state of being so grasped and embraced never to be abandoned is called the state of "non-retrogression" in which a person has come fully established and secured in Amida's Compassion never to be forsaken or abandoned.

Because he had been so embraced never to be abandoned, Shinran experienced an "awakening of faith" to declare: "all things are empty and vain, therefore, untrue. Only the *nembutsu* is true, real and sincere." In so saying, Shinran was not claiming that the way of Jodoshinshu was the only Buddhist sect or religion that had a monopoly on the *Dharma's* Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness. The fact is that what the Buddha taught is said to have some 84,000 paths or "avenues" leading to the topmost peak of a mountain mythologically called the *Dharma* Mountain (*Nori no Mi-yama*).

This is like saying that there are also 84,000 fingers pointing to the bright full moon in the night sky's total darkness. Buddha, however, cautioned us not to mistake the fingers or the reflections of the moon on the surface of lakes, especially the ones reflected on the surface of murky ponds and stagnant puddles, to be the actual moon itself. The world religions are but "fingers" pointing to the moon which is beyond their reach and grasp. Many religions, however, act as though they alone possess and have a monopoly over it. Then there also are religions pointing only to but one of the many reflections of the moon on the murky surfaces of

stagnant lakes as many sectarian and cult religions do.

Shinran's understanding of the nembutsu as being universal and not the property or monopoly of any one man, race, culture or religion is unmistakably seen in his following words:

It is utterly unthinkable that among the followers of single-hearted nembutsu practice there are arguments about "my disciples" and "other's disciples"....

... how arrogant to claim as disciples those who live the nembutsu through the sole working of Amida's compassion.

... How absurd that some people assert that if one goes against his own teacher and says the nembutsu under another, he cannot attain birth in the Pure Land. Are they saying that they will take back the true entrusting which is a gift from Amida as if it belonged to them? Impossible that such a thing should happen. T. Unno. *Tannisho*. V. p. 10.

Clearly, in these words of Shinran we see that the *Dharma's* Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness are not the property or a monopoly of any one person, race, creed, culture or religion.

As of consequence, whether a person makes choices and decisions based on the *Dharma's* Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness or not, clearly, this is all up to the person herself or himself. So, what a person chooses to think and believe or decides to say and do, this also is all up to her or him. Whether a person follows or ignores the Buddha's admonition: "speak the truth; do not yield to anger; be giving if thou art asked," it's all up to a person's conscience. This is what *karma* is all about.

If a person chooses to follow, abide and live the Noble Eightfold Path, such a person eventually will come to the edge or precipice where his or her life has nowhere to turn except to go on forward or turn back and return to "transmigrate" in and out of the "six realms." Such a person, therefore, must make that "leap of faith" out of the "six realms of transmigration" into the uncharted waters and currents of the unknown *Dharma* World's Infinite Selflessness and Boundless Togetherness that is the Great Unknown Beyond. To believe, trust, and take refuge in Amida, his Name and her Pure Land is to take such a "leap of faith." Such a decision is all up to the individual. That is, the person in the end herself or himself must make that "leap of faith" into the Great Unknown Beyond,

or fall back into one of those endless puddles and stagnant ponds of samsaric life where there are only reflections of the moon in each of the "six realms of transmigration."

This point was clearly depicted by Master Shan'tao in his Parable of the White Path and Two Rivers, where a lonely wayfaring traveler has come to the edge of the eastern bank of the River of Fire (burning resentments) and Water (ice cold selflessness) that are forever flowing into each other and cascading over the White Path. The resulting boiling mists and incinerating cinders constantly keep fogging to obscure the Path from sight. The traveler as a result becomes full of apprehensions, doubts and fears for he is unable to see that the Path is connected to the western bank, or the safety of the Other Bank that is Amida's Pure Land.

As of consequence, the world-weary traveler gets an occasional glimpse of only the first two or three strides of the Path that is a hundred strides in length. Because of the steaming mists and hot ashes he is unable to see the rest of the Path connected to the Other Bank. The traveler can see only the first two or three steps of the Path right before his feet where the two rivers, one of fire rolling up from the south and the other of water cascading down from the north, are imploding over the White Path into each other. He, therefore, is filled with apprehensions and uncertainties as to whether he can step and walk on the Path before him without falling into either the incinerating fires or the freezing waters.

Then out of nowhere a "voiceless voice" from behind the traveler urges him to trust and rely in the "voiceless voice" that is constantly calling out to him through freezing mist, fog and hot scorching cinders and ash. The "voiceless voice" coming from the Other Bank keeps calling: "Hurry, don't dilly dally before it's too late! Get on the Path immediately and begin walking the Path over to the safety of this Western Bank. Have no fears or doubts for I will never let you slip into either the river of scorching fire or fall into the river of freezing water.

The "voiceless voice" behind him is that of Sakyamuni who is no longer living amongst us. The "voiceless voice" calling the traveler from "Other Bank" is that of Amida Buddha who is eternally calling. The White Path itself is the Sacred Name of Amida connecting this world to the "Pure Land" full of Serenity and Bliss. The parable is saying that the world of man and the World of the Buddhas are connected and inseparable! Therefore, the "voiceless voices" of Sakyamuni urging and that of Amida beckoning are the same "voiceless voice" that is the Sacred Name that is *Namoh-Amida-*

Butsu! This is like when a child in seeing his mother calls out "mom," that is also the mother calling out to the child, it's me, your one and only "mom."

Here, in Shan'tao's parable, it becomes clear that in order to get to the Pure Land, one must make the decision to get on and begin walking the Path of O-nembutsu which is a life of gratitude, humility, reverence and penitence. That a person has stepped on and is walking the Path is evidenced especially by that person's quiet penitence and self introspection that is full of blissful serenity and joy (*anjin* = peace of mind). This is because such a person has been grasped as the karma riddled mortal he undeniably is never to be abandoned.

Now, of natural causal necessity, *karma* invariably equally applies to each and all persons without distinctions and exceptions. That the consequences of *karma* are irreversible once a word has been said or a thing has been done, this is an actuality, not a theory. This actually is indicated by the following words of Sakyamuni,

If a man causing pain to others wishes to obtain pleasure for himself, he entangled in the bonds of selfishness, will never be free from hatred. *op. cite.* pp. 152-153.

According to the Buddha, this proclivity in man to think, feel, speak and act in terms of his own self interests, convenience, and personal gain, these then are the underlying causes and reasons as to why the lives of human beings are full of contradictions and conflicts that often become quite devastating and destructive in the most gross and subtle of ways that are unthinkable and unimaginable.

This is why the Buddha admonished:

Whatsoever causes yourself pain, therewith wound not another.
Even if a man has power over others, yet ought he to be gentle with the weak. *loc. cite,* No. 3. p. 155.

He further admonished:

Let each man direct himself first to what is proper, then let him teach others; thus a wise man will not suffer.
If a man makes himself as he teaches others to be, then, being himself well subdued, he may subdue others; for one's own self is difficult to subdue.

This then is the underlying reason for a person's "... trusting and taking refuge in the *Dharma*..." For a person in having done so "... brings others to trust and take refuge in the *Dharma*." This then is the reason to live the life that is at once a life based on the Truth of Selflessness that is simultaneously the life that is the Actuality of Togetherness that benefits others as it benefits one's self.

To point out that the Buddha himself said so, Shinran Shonin in his *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho* quotes the *Sutra of Immeasurable Pure Enlightenment of Equality* as follows:

The person not possessed of the true is unable to hear the name of this sutra; only one who has observed the precepts with purity is now able to hear the right dharma. The person of evil, arrogance, the hindrance of passions, and indolence, will have difficulty entrusting himself to this dharma; but he who has encountered a Buddha in a previous life will joyfully listen to the teaching of the World-Honored One.

Rare is it to obtain human life, and difficult to encounter a Buddha's appearance in the world; hard is it to attain the wisdom of entrusting; should you meet with and hear this teaching, pursue it with diligence.

If a person, hearing and never forgetting this dharma, sees, reveres, and attains it, and greatly rejoices [in Amida's Sacred Name], then **he is my excellent, close companion;** therefore awaken aspiration for enlightenment.

Even when the world is filled with a great fire, pass through it and seek to hear the dharma [Amida's "voiceless voice"]; then **you will unfailingly become a world-honored one, and free all beings from birth, aging, and death.** SBT-Series. *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way.* Vol. I. pp. 77, 78. Words in bold are the essence and goal of Jodoshinshu *shinjin* or faith. [] are mine for clarification of dharma manifesting itself as Amida's voiceless six-character *Na-moh A-mi-da Butsu*.

This is why Shinran said: "... when ignorant and wise, even those having committed the five deadly transgressions and those who have slandered the Dharma," should they "... trust and take refuge in Amida," without exception, they will all attain "... the equal of enlightenment and supreme nirvana ... without severing blind passions ..." as stated in the *sutra* quoted above.

What this means is that, as soon as they arrive in the Pure Land, such karma riddled persons will instantly become Buddhas who then return to this

world that is a burning house [to] ... save those bound closest to us (meaning their loved ones) through transcendental powers, **no matter how deeply they are immersed in karmic suffering of the six realms of existence and the four modes of birth.** T. Unno. *Tannisho* V. p. 10. In bold to focus on the underlying significance of Amida's Vow that never forsakes or abandons.

This then is all due to the All-embracing World of *Dharma* that Shinran Shonin was "awakened" to in which "rebirth in the Pure Land" means that one, in attaining Buddhahood, becomes empowered by the *Dharma's* Selfless Wisdom and its All-embracing Compassion to then return as a Buddha to the "six realms of transmigration" to liberate the sentient beings still transmigrating therein as all the other Buddhas over timeless time have been, are and continue to do. Buddhas, therefore, enter even the deepest of unfathomable hells to grasp and return with those therein to the Pure Lands.

Thus, the Primal Vows of Amida Buddha are for these reasons, expressive of the "highest aspiration and determination" that all beings, not only one's self (or just human beings), will all be equally liberated and become free, that is a Buddha "selflessly" dedicated to the benefiting of others and not just one's self (*jiri rita em'man* = going full circle = inclusivity = togetherness = embracing all beings especially the karma riddled ones). Such then is the significance of the "Circle w/o a Circumference" symbolic of the *Dharma's* all-pervading Selflessness and its all-embracing Togetherness that never forsakes nor abandons any sentient being.

Now such a thought of inclusiveness that unconditionally embraces especially "evil beings hopelessly riddled by wrong views and arrogance," such a thought is the most difficult of difficult things for a self-centered person to accept, said Shinran. For such a person it becomes even more difficult to see and realize as Shinran did that:

... the peoples of the world constantly say, even the evil person attains birth, how much more so the good person. Although this appears to be sound at first glance, it goes against the intention of the Primal Vow of the Other Power. The reason is that **since**

the person of self-power, being conscious of doing good, lacks the thought of entrusting himself completely to Other Power, he is not the focus of the Primal Vow of Amida. But when he turns over self-power and entrusts himself to Other Power, he attains birth in the land of True Fulfillment. T. Unno. *Tannisho*. Ch. III p. 8. Bold for emphasis.

So, paradoxically, Shinran realized that it is "... the evil person who entrusts himself to Other Power ..." who is "... truly the one who attains birth in the Pure Land." This is because a person who believes he is "god-like" in comparison to those who he perceives and judges to be "ungodly." Such a person is not yet unaware of the depths of his own karmic transgressions and desecrations of the *Dharma* that has set her or him heading for a "hellish existence."

Furthermore, for this reason, noted Shinran, "... even the good person attains birth, how much more so the evil person" [*ibid.* () mine for clarity]. These words of Shinran make it quite clear that Sakyamuni's teachings based on his visions of Amida Buddha and her Pure Land were based on the *Dharma's* Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness that all things living and non-living are permeated by sacredness and spirituality and that sentient beings and Buddhas are inseparable from each other.

Buddha by definition, therefore, is a divine manifestation of the *Dharma's* Selfless Wisdom and its All-embracing Compassion. Therefore a Buddha, as mentioned, is a being motivated by the "highest aspiration" possessed of the "highest skills" to guide others to what Shinran called the abode of "unobstructed freedom," a state of being in which said he, "no self working is true self working."

It is then, and only then, that one, paradoxically, awakens to one's self hopelessly riddled by transgressions and desecrations, a self that was, is and yet continues to be grasped by Amida, never ever to be abandoned until one breathes his last. (*loc. cite, p. 162.*)

Let us then humble ourselves before Amida's Vows of all-embracing Unconditional Compassion for all beings of sentience, especially his Primal Vow not to forsake and abandon the person hopelessly riddled by irreversible moral confusions, spiritual ignorance, transgressions and desecrations (*avidya*). Let us express our gratitude and indebtedness to Amida by reciting and repeating

Amida's Name in gratitude and especially a penitence as explained above!

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

Kalamas, a Brahmin, asked the Buddha concerning his doubts about the many spiritual teachers (*gurus*) each proclaiming their own views to be superior to the teachings of all others. The Buddha replied:

Yes, Kalamas, it is proper that you have doubt, that you have perplexity, for a doubt has arisen in a matter which is doubtful. Now, look you, Kalamas, do not be led by reports, or tradition, or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances, nor by the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea, "this is our teaching." But, O Kalamas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (*akusala*), and wrong and bad, then give them up ... And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (*kusala*) and good, then accept them and follow them.

Walpola Rahula. *What Buddha Taught*. pp. 2, 3.

Sakyamuni Buddha, therefore, advises Kalamas not to believe in something simply because it was rumored and repeated by many, or claimed by self-proclaimed teachers or religious authorities. Therefore, he said, "Be a lamp unto yourself! Let the Truth itself alone be your only Refuge!"

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What are the "Five Hindrances" to a life of genuine faith?

ANSWER: According to Walpola Rahula they are: (1) Sensuous Lust, (2) Ill-will, (3) Physical and Mental Torpor and Languor, (4) Restlessness and Worry, (5) Doubt. According to Rahula these are not 'sins' because "In fact there is no 'sin' in Buddhism as sin is understood in some religions as a defiance of a Supreme Deity's will and commandments. The root of all evil is ignorance (*avijja*) and false views (*miccha ditthi*)...." (W. Rahula. *loc. cite*, p. 3).

