



GASSHO

*"Hands together
in reverence & gratitude"*

January 2013

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Happy New Year 2013

by Autan, 2006

NOSTALGIC JAPANESE NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

A Happy New Year to you all with our family's Best Wishes that the year 2013 will bring us even more deeper encounters with the Truth and Reality of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness. Shinran Shonin said: "... all living things have been my parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in many states of existence ..." (Dennis Hirota. *Tannisho: A Primer*. p. 24). These words point out the fact that human beings in the present are all connected to the countless "things" and "lives" in the past. This also means we are also connecting to the lives of countless others who are yet to be born in the future. Therefore, we each need to be responsible and accountable for our ongoing thoughts, words and actions with self-reflection and contemplation of things sacred that are timeless spiritual.

MONTH'S THOUGHT



What can be said in New Year rhymes,
That's not been said a thousand times?
The new years come, the old years go,
We know we dream, we dream we know,
We rise up laughing with the light,
We lie down weeping with the night,
We hug the world until it stings,
We curse it then and sigh for wings.
We live, we love, we woo, we wed,
We wreath our prides, we sheet our dead
We laugh, we weep, we hope, we fear,
And that's the burden of a year.

— Ella Wheeler Wilcox



REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR JANUARY 2013

TUESDAY Jan 1st:

“New Year’s Day Service”

10 A.M. English service

1st SUN Jan 6th:

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

2nd SUN Jan 13th:

GOSHOOKI HOONKO SERVICE

9 A.M. Eng service

Guest Speaker:
Rev. Sandra Hiramatsu

3rd SUN Jan 20th:

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

4th SUN Jan 27th:

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

With Deepest Sympathy

Ms. Helena H. Rapoza 59 yrs. Nov. 14, 2012
Ms. Patsy Kawaoka 75 yrs. Nov. 16, 2012
Mrs. Joan Y. Mukai 82 yrs. Nov. 22, 2012
Mrs. Florence Yabusaki 93 yrs. Nov. 28, 2012

THANK YOU

for **YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!**

2013 Memorial Service Schedule

2012	1 Year	2011	3 Year	2007	7 Year
2001	13 Year	1997	17 Year	1989	25 Year
1981	33 Year	1964	50 Year	1914	100 Year

This awakening to a past before our births and a future beyond our deaths was metaphysically stated by Shinran Shonin as follows:

... **The realm of nirvana** refers to the place where one overturns the delusion of ignorance and realizes the supreme enlightenment. **Realm** means “place”; you should know it as the attaining of enlightenment. **Nirvana** has innumerable names. ... Nirvana is called extinction of passions, the uncreated, peaceful happiness, eternal bliss, true reality, dharmakaya, dharma-nature, suchness, oneness, and Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is none other than Tathagata. This Tathagata pervades the countless worlds, it fills the hearts and minds of oceans of beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood. SBT-Series. *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone.’* p. 42.

The phrase, “ocean of beings,” therefore, makes it unmistakably clear that all things are alive and vibrating with Buddha-mind and Buddha-nature, or what are the Dharma’s Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness.

Therefore, one of the most difficult things to see is the fact that we are dying as we are also living. And, paradoxically, in each passing moment, this is why as we struggle to keep on living everything also keeps changing and fading away. Especially today, human beings, in comparison to those who lived in the Dark Ages, are enjoying longer life, good health, material prosperity, comforts, conveniences and goodies. But, in enjoying the affluent modern life, we today are looking only at one third of our lives that is only a third of the “Wheel of Life,” or what are the “six realms of transmigration.

The past and the future are ignored by many of us because we are focused only on the present. The past is thought to be obsolete, while the future as not any of our concern. Therefore the attitude prevails: “whatever will be will be,” or *shikata ga nai* as the Japanese say, meaning “there is nothing we can do about what has or is to happen.

Nevertheless, people keep observing their cultural traditions and ethnic customs on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day, much of which are based on superstition and religious myth as perpetuated by one’s cultural heritage and mores, for example, like Christmas and Easter full of pagan elements.

Let us, therefore, recall some of the traditional Japanese observances of New Year’s Eve and Day that have become compromised due to

WORDS OF SHINRAN

... **grasped** means to embrace. **Protected** means that the Buddha protects the person of shinjin without pause — in all places, at all times, and without any discrimination among people. “Protected” means that one cannot be deterred by those who have taken up other teachings and beliefs, nor obstructed by those of different understandings and practices; one is not threatened by the heavenly demon Papiya, nor troubled by evil gods and demons. **Never to be abandoned:** these words teach us that the person of shinjin is embraced and protected by the heart of the Buddha of wisdom-light and that he is never abandoned, but always resides within that heart of light. SBT-Series. *Notes on Once-calling and Many calling.* p. 38.

modernism and secularism.

In Japan, there is the longstanding Buddhist tradition of “sounding” (not “striking” or “hitting” or “banging”) the *bonsho*, a huge outdoor hanging bell on temple courtyards. The “sounding” of a *bonsho* ripples mellowed vibrations that gently fade away. They are most soothing and calming sounds. The bell is so “sounded” a hundred and eight times. The TV networks in Japan televise these “soundings” of a *bonsho* beginning at 11:30 P.M. The final 108th sounding is timed to coincide with the 00:00 hour midnight. Each year, a different temple in some city, village, valley or mountain side is televised.

The number “108” represents the hundred and eight kinds of blind passions and self vanities (*bonno*) that plague and undermine a person’s moral efforts to be spiritually pure, honest, gentle, kind and generous. These 108 passions have been classified into ten major *bonno* and twenty secondary *bonno*. These passions and vanities in human beings are then reduced to three basic categories: greed, hatred and vanity, or the “three venoms” that constantly poison a person’s thoughts, words and actions.

To sit quietly listening to these soothing, rippling, mellow vibrations of a *bonsho* fading away are meant for people to calmly reflect on the follies and foibles of the past year. Then the purpose is to see how our lives have, are and yet continue to be affected by selfishness, hostilities and self vanities. Such inward reflections and introspections

should lay bare and naked especially one's past transgressions and desecrations that cannot be rectified no matter how hard one tries to undo them. For the karmic consequences of our words and actions, such as having committed the Five Deadly Transgressions or Slandered the Right Dharma, are not reversible.

Therefore, the purpose of sounding the *bonsho* a hundred and eight times is not only to usher out the old year and welcome in the new year, but, more importantly, to afford us the quality spiritual time to reflect on our past year's mental indiscretions, verbal desecrations and acts of desecrations and, thereby, to resolve to live and end each day of the incoming New Year in gratitude, humility, reverence and especially penitence.

The common characteristic of Buddhist hanging bells, altar gongs and smaller hand held bells (*rin*) is that they have no clappers (metal clangers) hanging from their inner centers. In sounding a Buddhist bell or gong, because they have no clangers or clappers, the hanging bell is "sounded" by a wooden beam from "without" that produce vibrations that first go to "the very still center" of the bell and become the mellow rippling out flowing vibrations most soothing and calming instead of "clangings" that are "arousing." Such then is the difference in the resonance of a *bonsho* when compared to the clangings of a church bell. So, it becomes surprising to discover that at their very centermost axis of a Buddhist bell there is complete stillness, no vibrations. This stillmost axial center symbolizes Emptiness or the Truth of Selflessness that is the Dharma's Reality of Togetherness that resounds outward with the mellow tones to reverberate and embrace all things in the universe with Selfless Mind and All-embracing Heart of the Eternal Buddha.

Japan historically has been proclaimed to be the "Land of *Yamato*" (Great Serenity, Peace), or *Yamato Damashi*. *Yamato Damashi* can mean the "Japanese spirit," "Japanese soul," or "The Soul of Old Japan" often referred to as "The Spirit of Yamato." It is more like the "Aloha Spirit" or what the Japanese experience as "a heart free of willful intellect and self justifying logic." Lafcadio Hearn, in his *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (1904), saw this spirit and soul of the Japanese to be steeped more in the "matters of the heart," than with the "matters of the brain" (*rikitsu*).

Now, most interestingly, the kanji character for *kokoro* was a pictograph of a "pulsating heart" connected to one's brain and to the extremities of the human body through the spinal column. So the original kanji for *kokoro* was a picture of the

heart connected to the body not just connecting the brain or the heart alone but to the whole body through the spinal column,. So this was why Hearn said that *Yamato Damashi*, or *Yamato-gokoro*, is the "Soul" or "Heart" of Japan that "is more a type of moral national character rather than a warrior mentality associated with a samurai's fearlessness of death. Unfortunately, this attitude of a samurai in the Meiji Restoration Era was exploited by the Japanese military that misapplied the Zen spirit of selflessness and fearlessness as the "way of the warrior" (*bushido*), for a loyal soldier ready to die for one's Lord or nation.

Tamashii or *damashi* also means a ghost-like spirit or an autonomous soul. But in Shinto, the term "spirit" refers to the diverse energies and forces as found in the various aspects of nature. There are, however, no words in the European or English languages that can do justice to what the Japanese mean by a seamless mind, body and spirit. One's *tamashii* (spirit) in the popular sense usually concerns one's "soul" (spiritual egoism) in terms of one's own self interests, advantages, benefits and especially one's individual salvation. The world of *kokoro* also is what the ancient Hawaiians experienced as the "Aloha Spirit."

In Asian countries there are benevolent and malevolent celestial deities and terrestrial gods of every kind believed to be residing in everything, even in rocks, trees, especially in majestic mountains. So one of the traditions for Japanese families is to have a thorough house cleaning of their homes referred to as *nenmatsu no o-soji*, or the "great year-end house cleaning" to sweep out the demons (*oni*) and welcome in good fortune (or gods and spirits of prosperity and good tidings). Many Japanese families in hopes of doing so, pay tribute and make offerings to their *toshigami* or to the gods and spirits of the New Year.

Then, in February, Japanese observe *setsubun* by throwing goodies to people waiting as they shout: "demons out, good fortune in" (*oni wa soto, fuku wa naka*). Buddhists, in understanding the facts of causation, conditionality, interdependency and karma, do not observe such traditions based on superstitions, divinations or magic such as practiced by fortune tellers, soothsayers, shamans or sorcerers and so forth that defy the facts of causality, and, therefore, also the consequences of karma.

On New Year's Eve and on New Year's Day, many supposed Buddhists go to Shinto Shrines and Buddhist temples to purchase colorful *omamori* (good luck charms or protective talismans) believed to bring good fortune and effective in warding off

calamities. Shinshu Kyokai as a Jodoshinshu Buddhist temple does not do this. Many traditional Japanese in Hawaii, however, go to their shrines and temples to purchase such charms and talismans. They believe such charms, amulets and objects will bring them long life, good health, prosperity, protection from misfortune.

Then there is the tradition of *hatsumo'ude* where traditional Japanese families with their children in traditional Japanese dress visit their shrines to pray to *kami-sama* (deities) or visit their home temples to pay their respects to *hotoke-sama* (Buddhas). In both instances, supplications are made for good health, safety, protection, prosperity and personal prayers are made for better things for their families for the rest of the year. Again, such entreaties are not based on the life of O-nembutsu gratitude, reverence, humility and penitence that are based on the orderly and uniform laws of causality, conditionality, interdependence and karma. Jodoshinshu Buddhists do not engage in recitations of O-nembutsu as some kind of magical incantation for some a miraculous outcome (See *Tannisho*. Ch V. Also *Jodoshinshu Handbook for Laymen*. No. 164, p. 178; No. 165, p. 179).

Many Shinto Shrines as well as Buddhist temples in Japan engage in selling printed oracle readings (*omikujii*) as well. Jodoshinshu Buddhists do not believe in such printed oracular readings. For they take to heart the words of the Buddha as follows:

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. *Dhammapada I. Praises of the Buddha*. p. 151.

Therefore, the principle of “the benefitting of self that simultaneously is the benefitting of others (*jiri rita enman*),” is the path of O-nembutsu that leads to the Pure Land because it is based on the “Truth of Selflessness” and its “Actuality of Togetherness” as manifested in the Vows of Amida Buddha that is also Amida’s Sacred Name: *Namoh-amida Butsu!*

Omisoka, New Year’s Eve, being the final day of the old year, is considered to be the second most important day next to New Year’s Day. So, the day that begins each new year is called *gan tan* (the first day of the new year) or *shogatsu* (the first day of the foremost month of the year).

For this reason, New Year’s Day service is called *shusho-e*, which means to gather together

SHINRAN’S WASAN

How truly sad it is today,
that all in Japan today,
whether monk or lay,
In observing Buddhist rites
and ritual observance,
Worship supernatural beings,
revering heavenly deities
and earthly gods.

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 104
rkt trans.

in our temples as fellow seekers (*ondo-bo*) and fellow practitioners (*ondo-gyo*) to reflect upon our past thoughts, words and actions and to correct, thereby, what can be rectified and look forward for opportunities in which to do our best to better our lives and that of others throughout the coming new year.

Shusho-e in Hawaii is observed just on New Year’s Day. In traditional Japan, it is observed for a period of seven days. In the Nara Period, this seven day long period was observed to wish for next year’s good fortune and a bountiful harvest and also to extend one’s best wishes for the good health and longevity of the Emperor and his family.

Usually *toshikoshi* *soba*, as well as *ozoni*, are prepared to observe New Year’s Day. And in certain areas, instead of *soba*, *toshikoshi-udon* are prepared. The meaning of eating *soba* or *udon* noodles lies in the “length” and “long-ness” of the noodles the hope is that one’s “crossing over from the old year to the new year” will be unbroken and continue to be without incidents or troubles. The hope is that one’s life will be as long as *soba* or *udon* noodles, that one’s life will continue to be full of uninterrupted happiness.

I partake of this custom instead to express my indebtedness and gratitude to Amida-sama, that I have been “enabled” to have come this far in my life and get to live, hopefully, yet another full year in good health and spirits. However, in doing so, one should not believe or think that one’s well being and happiness, thereby, has been guaranteed just because one has prayed and made the proper offerings. In reality, to believe so is a presumption on the part of our “spiritual egos.”

In olden times there was no refrigeration, canning or packaging as we have today. It was difficult to keep food from spoiling and going bad.

Now, the Eightfold Noble Path is a process that transforms a person's whole being. Therefore, to live the Eightfold Path is to maintain the proper balance between one's body, mind, heart and spirit that is of great importance. For, if the body suffers, so does the mind, heart and spirit. If the spirit suffers, so does the mind, heart and body.

So eating proper foods and drinking pure liquids are important factors in maintaining one's mental acuity, emotional clarity, physical well-being and spiritual awareness through maintaining a healthy body. Thus, the significance of the fifth precept should not be understood merely as abstaining from alcoholic beverages, but more about not ingesting harmful foods and drinks (cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.). This is attested to by problems of obesity with its attendant problems of diabetes that plagues so many today.

In keeping a proper dietary balance, it is important to realize that the Eightfold Path recommended by Sakyamuni Buddha is fundamentally based on the Five Precepts and not on any miraculous cure alls or magical diets. The power of the Buddha's teaching as well as Shinran Shonin's life is based on gratitude, reverence, humility and penitence. Therefore, these precepts are not based on some supernatural or miraculous claim that defies karma or contravenes causation.

The life of O-nembutsu actually begins with the Right Contemplation of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness that transform our outlook on life, so that we are enabled to face the truth of impermanence without fears and trepidations. For the Truth of Dharma "transforms" our ingratitude into a profound gratitude for each living moment that is inseparable and connected to the past and future.

Traditionally, Japanese people also eat a special selection of dishes over a seven day New Year celebration period with foods called *osechi-ryori*. Typically it consists of boiled seaweed, fish cakes, mashed sweet potato with chestnut, simmered burdock root and sweetened black soybeans. Many New Year's dishes were prepared sweet, sour, or dried, so that they would keep, because there were no refrigerators in those days. Food, back in those times, were made to last by drying, sweetening, souring, salting and so forth.

On New Year's Day, Japanese also have a custom of giving money to their children known as *otoshidama*. It is handed out in *pochibukuro*, or small decorated envelopes much like Chinese red envelopes. During the Edo Period or the Tokugawa

Period (1603-1868), large stores and wealthy families used to give out small bags of *mochi* and a Mandarin orange instead.

In Asia, rice is a staple of life. In many prefectures stalks drooping with heads of ripe rice are bunched together. Drooping heads of ripe rice symbolizing humility and gratitude are offered to the gods with prayers hoping for a bounteous crop for the coming year. The heads of ripening rice bending toward the earth also symbolize gratitude for the bounties of the Earth and also for the blessings from the heavens above. So, the tradition of families and relatives coming together to pound steamed sticky, glutinous rice (*mochigome*) and making rice cakes (*mochi*) in Japan are traditions that bring families together to express their indebtedness to the heavens above and the earth below for all their blessings both celestial and terrestrial.

Steamed glutinous rice, as of consequence, is also made into large disc like cakes called *kagami mochi*. They are presented as offerings to the various deities (*Kami-sama*) and Buddhas (*Hotoke-sama*) as revered by the Japanese. Two round cakes of *kagami mochi*, the smaller one on the larger one, topped with a bitter orange called *daidai*, are offered to the various gods and goddesses in shrines as well as to the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in temples. This is also done in their home Shinto altars and family Buddhist shrines. The term *daidai* is also a phoneme that means "from generation to generation" or "over the seamless passing generations."

The phrase "from generation to generation" implies that the past, present and future are seamless and inseparable. This means that the living family should not cut itself off from its countless past ancestors as well as from their progeny yet to be born in the distant future.

Now, *daidai* also is the name of a bitter citrus fruit that originated in India then introduced to China, Korea and finally into Japan. The *daidai* is so bitter that it usually is not eaten. But its dried peel is used in Chinese and Japanese herbal medicine. The amazing thing is that if it is not picked after turning a ripe orange, it can stay on the tree for a few more years.

Then, even stranger yet, the orange color, after a certain time, turns green once again. The "orange-ness" turning once again into "greenness" makes the offering of a *daidai* on *kagamimochi* is symbolic of the fact that life is an endless repetitive process of birth, growth, decay and death, and that life involves not only "sweetness" but much

"bitterness" as well. For example, such unbearable things as sickness, loss of loved ones, and conflicts between family members and next of kin, especially the inner conflicts within one's own self are full of incomprehensive contradictions. These troublesome paradoxes boggle one's mind and spirit. Certainly, no one can exempt herself or himself from aging as well from under going final death. And as Rennyo Shonin said: "Can anyone claim to have lived or be living her or his life in perfect health and happiness?" (*Epistle of White Ashes*).

Therefore, all human beings ultimately come face to face with the undeniable fact that they are mere mortals full of shameful transgressions and desecrations. As of consequence, as the mere mortals we are, we can only but "entrust our karma riddled selves" to Amida Buddha's Selfless Light of Wisdom and her Unconditional Compassion of Togetherness that has never or will ever forsake, condemn or abandon any one of us exactly because of our implacable transgressions and irreversible desecrations (*See Tannisho. epilogue*). For this was exactly why Amida vowed to bring us all to our "awakening" and "attainment" of each sentient being's final Buddhahood "just as we they were" through her sacred Name: *Namoh-Amida-Butsu!* All that is needed on our part is for us is to trust and take refuge in Amida's Light of Wisdom that is her Sacred Name full of Unconditional Compassion that has never abandoned any being and continues to embrace them all without rejections!

Therefore, in the precise instant a person trusts and leaves everything up to Amida Buddha, such a person, according to Shinran Shonin,

... treads the great path free of all obstacles.
For the gods of heaven and the deities of earth bow in homage to a practitioner of shinjin, and those of the world of demons or of non-Buddhist ways never hinder him,

continued on p.8

moreover, the evil he does cannot bring forth its karmic results, nor can any good act equal in virtue his saying of the Name. Dennis Hirota. *Tannisho: A Primer*. Ch VII. p. 26.

In other words, if a person is still troubled and unsettled by doubts concerning Amida's Inconceivable Vow that is Namoh-amida-butsu, this is an indication that such a person, as yet, has not completely entrusted herself or himself to Amida Buddha's Vow that has never or will ever abandon her or him.

If you haven't as yet done so, may you find the strength to make that "leap of faith" by taking refuge in the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness manifest as Amida Buddha's Sacred Name as Namoh-amida-butsu. For in this world that is a "burning house" full of incomprehensible conflicts riddled with overwhelming contradictions the truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness is the best, if not the only safe refuge and haven. Happy New Year to you all! Namoh-amida-butsu.

BUDDHIST STORY OR PASSAGE

A foolish man was once boiling honey. His friend suddenly appeared and the foolish man wanted to offer him some honey, but it was too hot, and without removing it from the fire he fanned it to make it cool. In like manner, it is impossible to get the honey of cool wisdom without first removing it from the fire of worldly passions. BDK - *The Teaching of Buddha*. (Eng./Japnese) pp. 278-280.

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: I've seen televangelists performing seemingly magical and miraculous things by the "laying of hands" and the name of Jesus Christ. What about Buddhism?

ANSWER: According to *Jodoshinshu Handbook for Laymen*: "Buddhism disavows as superstition such claims and acts that are not in accord with the law of karma that is governed by causality, conditionality and interdependency. All prayers for miracles and magical supplication are categorically rejected in Buddhism."

In the *Jodo Shinshu Handbook* under topic 67 on Hongwanji tradition it says, "Fully understand the law of karma and disavow all prayers of supplication, witchcraft and fortunetelling as being superstitions. Therefore, no Jodo Shinshu temple will allow prayers or such rites" (p. 69).

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Shinshu Kyokai Mission *General Membership Meeting & New Year Party*

February 10, 2013
10:30 AM
at Social Hall

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