



GASSHO

October

2013

Issue No: 10-13

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



EGO-SELF WORKING, NO EGO-SELF WORKING

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

The Buddha "awoke" to the undeniable reality that "life is full of suffering" which does not mean that "life equals suffering." To translate *dukkha* as "life is suffering" is to misconstrue what the Buddha taught about life to be nothing more than a fatalism and a determinism.

Therefore, the First Noble Truth concerning the actuality that "life is full of suffering" is the truth that:

"There is so much we can learn from the experience of *dhukka*, which describes the full gamut of cyclic conditioned existence, the wheel of samsara caused by our habitual clinging. It might seem like bad news to hear that life is permeated with suffering, but just because we experience dissatisfaction or pain, or that our pleasures do not last, or that our precious dreams turn into nightmares, does not mean that our life is rendered meaningless." Traleg Rinpoche. *Knowing this Truth is Noble*.

Therefore, *dukkha* means that we need to look into what are the actual causes and real reasons as to why human beings encounter so much pain and anguish in their lives. To do so leads one to the Second Noble Truth which then leads to the Third which finally leads to the Fourth that is Nirvana, or what is a life of "unobstructed freedom" which is to be living the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Buddha's analysis of human beings is that the rope of their lives are full of "knots" and "snarls" that have, are and continue to entangle and are choking them with greediness, resentments

MONTH'S THOUGHT



The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us. —**Black Elk** (1863-1950)



and divisiveness because of their "ego selves working." Therefore, the rope of their lives also are full of "kinks" and "double knots." In other words, human beings are riddled by transgressions and desecrations. As long as they continue to tie such knots, the inevitable consequences of karmic necessity naturally keep triggering misconceptions, falsehoods and deviousness in their lives. Human beings, therefore, constantly find themselves trying to untie the endless "snarls," "tangles," "kinks," and "knots" on the rope of their lives.

This is why suffering, *dukkha*, involves the full gamut of our ever changing anatomy, thoughts, moods, desires and sense of personal worth. This phenomena of human consciousness is represented by the "wheel of samsara," or what are "the six realms of transmigration." A sentient being in the unenlightened mode meanders constantly between the extremes of heavenly existence (pleasurable gratifying states) and hellish existence (painful miserable states). Sentient beings sensually, intellectually and subjectively cling to what is pleasurable and pleasing while constantly

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR OCTOBER 2013

1st SUN Oct 6th:

No Service

2nd SUN Oct 13th:

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

3rd SUN Oct 20th:

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

4th SUN Oct 27th:

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

Rev. Tatsuguchi will be off island
Sept. 26 to Oct. 10

2013 Memorial Service Schedule

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

With Deepest Sympathy

Mrs. Ruth Morita 99 yrs. Aug. 15, 2013

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trying to avoid what is painful, aversive and repulsive.

Therefore, the First Noble Truth of Suffering simply means that life is “full of suffering” and not that “life equals suffering.” Just because life is full of anguish and discontent or because sensual pleasures do not last for forever, or because our precious hopes and dreams often turn into nightmares, this does not mean that our lives, therefore, are rendered into a “no-thing-ness” as those critical of Buddhism often try to depict what the Buddha taught to be nothing more than a nihilism or a negation of life.

In real life there are many forms of sensuality, intellectuality and subjectivity that can lead to an “awakening of true and real faith.” Human beings in the state of ignorance (*avidya*) keep inflicting on themselves and others much pain and anguish because of their unbridled cravings and burning vanities that impel them to commit transgressions and desecrations that then have personal and collective karmic consequences with irreversible physical, psychological, moral and spiritual effects and affects.

This is why human beings undergo the eight kinds of suffering:

1. Suffering in the birth process.
2. Suffering in aging.
3. Suffering during an illness.
4. Suffering in the process of dying.
5. Experiencing pain when separated from loved ones.
6. Experiencing aversion and revulsion in encountering uncongenial persons.
7. Experiencing emotional devastation when hopes and dreams are dashed.
8. Experiencing moral and spiritual contradiction and paradox.

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

“The nembutsu for its devotee, is not a [form of religious] practice nor a good [and virtuous] act. It is not a practice because the devotee does not practice the Nembutsu at his [calculative] discretion and it is not a good [and virtuous] act because the devotee does not create good at his [calculative] discretion. All is by virtue of the Other Power and is free of our own power; therefore, the Nembutsu, for its devotee, is not a [form of religious] practice nor a good [and virtuous] act.” Thus Spake the Blessed Sage Ryukyo Fujimoto. *Shin Buddhim's Essence: The Tannisho*. p. 20.

That human beings can become aware of such personal and collective sufferings confirms the fact that they are blessed with a conscience that is constantly searching for self fulfillment and self affirmation based on the Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness.

One of the profound insights offered by Shinran Shonin is that we cannot merely rely only on our own immediate sensual and mental perceptions to tell us whether we are experiencing well-being or misery. Just because we feel gratified or satisfied, or just because everything seems to lead to doom and gloom, these psycho-somatic impressions may not necessarily reflect the true state of one's innermost being. A person needs to look yet deeper into her or his innermost person for what is actual, real and sincere as illuminated by the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and embraced by its Reality of Togetherness that are without condemnations or rejections.

Detractors of Buddhism misconstrue the Buddha's message that all things and life are interdependent and inseparable by disparaging what he taught was that “life is nothing more than suffering.” For if all of things are impermanent (*anitya*), they then concluded that the self does not exist because then it is an “illusion” (*anatman*).

In so concluding, they misconstrued the truth of “impermanence” to literally mean that the person or self (*atman*) in transiency does not actually exist. The First Noble Truth of Suffering does not mean

that the self in constantly changing does not exist. The actualities of one's everchanging person and personality does not mean that the living a life in transiency itself is nothing more than suffering. The actual cause and reason for a person's pain and anguish, said the Buddha, are to be found in the depths of a person's innermost thoughts, feelings, sentiments, motivations and desires that keep triggering the very words that one says and does through one's "ego-self working."

As Benjamin F. Skinner, the behaviorist, has said, ever since our birth, our "reactions" and "responses" have been conditioned by external things and situations (external contingencies) that are pleasurable (rewarding) and painful (punishing). In Buddhism, to be living in this dualistic state of "ego-self working" keeps a person thinking that lasting well being and happiness can be obtained through ephemeral and momentary pleasures, which is to be living a life in denial that there are aspects to life that are sacred and spiritual that should not be violated or desecrated.

To be living merely for pleasurable experiences and avoiding painful things, such a person is not aware that things pleasurable can suddenly turn into pain, and that painful things also, paradoxically, can turn into pleasure. This paradoxical relationship between what is painful and pleasurable is quite evident in our times when an overwhelming number of people easily "fall in love" then quickly "fall out of love" with the endless things and people that pass in and out of their lives. More significantly, we see these anomalies of sadism and masochism in the lives of neurotics, sociopaths and psychopaths who misconstrue pleasure for pain and visa versa.

Therefore, in Shin Buddhism, we are asked to entrust our total being (*kokoro* or *mind-body-spirit*) to the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness by taking refuge in its All-embracing Togetherness wherein one's "ego-self working" becomes transformed into a "no ego-self working." This does not mean that a person's self has been negated or obliterated into a "no-thing-ness" or "insignificance." In being so transformed, one's mind, heart and entire being becomes calm, serene and at peace (*anjin*). It becomes pacified and full of joy instead of resentments. For then one then becomes settled and established in the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness. One then becomes "awakened" to the fact that one's "ego-self" undeniably is being

constantly blinded by one's self-centered passions and agendas to the last breath of one's life on the face of this earth.

In being so "awakened," such a person is instantly "transformed" and "enabled" by power and virtue of Amida's Sacred Name to relate and become aware of the actuality that "one is dying as one lives" and also "living as one is dying." In being so "awake," such a person becomes truly realistic and humanized in his acts of kindness and generosity, or what Shinran calls "no-self working is true self working," that is free of pretensions and presumptions.

To living in the unenlightened mode until one's final breath of life, is to be living with an "ego-self constantly contriving" and "seeking" for personal advantage and gain. Such a person then cannot accept the actuality that this world is a "burning house" full of suffering. As long as one remains in this self-centered and self-serving state of "ego-self working," such a person remains unable to arrive at the Second Truth that "suffering has physical causes as well as its hidden subjective reasons." Without this "awakening," then the Third Truth that leads to forming a proper solution to resolve the particular idiosyncrasies of one's problems will not be found and resolved.

This then would mean that the final Fourth Truth which is to live the Eightfold Noble Path will not be possible for such a person because her or his "ego-self" is constantly working to tie "knots" instead of untying them. These "ego knots" keep obscuring the Eightfold Way that can lead a person to a life of "unobstructed freedom" and final Buddhahood.

According to Shinran Shonin, such a transformation occurs in the instant a person has undergone an "awakening of true and real faith" by trusting and taking refuge in Amida Buddha. In that very instant one's Buddhahood becomes assured and securely established by power of the Truth of Selflessness and its virtues that is the Reality of Togetherness! However, according to Jodoshinshu (Shin Buddhism), full enlightenment is not possible as long as we still exist in this world where our "egos are constantly working" for their self advantage and constantly indulging in passing pleasures. We can see this undeniable fact of divisiveness and conflict in all kinds of rivalries and violence between human beings, even within

families, communities, and nations. We can become fully enlightened Buddhas only upon being reborn (arriving) in Amida's Pure Land or Nirvana Without Residues.

Unlike other theocentric religions, Buddhism concerns itself with inanimate as well as animate forms of existence to equally embrace them all in the spirit of non-violence (*ahimsa*) much like what is the "Aloha Spirit." Therefore, Buddhism in all its sectarian forms sees being born as a human being to be a rarity and a blessing. This is because human beings are born with a conscience that can lead them to a "two-fold awakening" which is like the two sides of the single coin called "true and real faith" (*shin-jitsu shinjin*).

One side of genuine faith is the Mind of Wisdom and Heart of Compassion or what is Amida's Mind of Selflessness and her Heart of Togetherness. The other side are sentient beings that have never rejected or abandoned or condemned. Because of Amida's Mind of Wisdom and her Heart of Compassion, a karma riddled human being is "enabled" to realize that she or he is inseparable from Amida and is inseparable and embraced by the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness, and its Reality of Togetherness.

Therefore, the one side of this coin of faith is the realization that it is because of Amida's Light and Life that one's "ego-self constantly contriving and working" in devious and self-indulgent ways, exactly for these very reasons, has been grasped just as it is never to be condemned or rejected until Buddhahood is realized.

Therefore, one's conscience as illuminated by the Light and Life of Amida Buddha comes to be seen as the optimal vehicle through which one's spiritual journey as a hapless karma-riddled being is finally "transformed" into full enlightenment and Buddhahood upon one's rebirth in the Pure Land or Nirvana Without Residues.

Therefore, Master Shan'tao's Parable of the Two Rivers and the White Path makes it amply clear that this world is a "burning house" (*samsara*) that is fully embraced within the Pure Land (*nirvana*). In essence this world and the Pure Land are the same and seamless because they are inseparable. However, human beings in the unenlightened state grievously mistake their "ego-selves working" to be distinct from and above other

SHINRAN'S WASAN

Those doing good works
based on their own virtues,
And seekers with doubting minds,
Should first realize how indebted
they are to the Tathagata's
Great Compassion for them,
And be steadfast in uttering
the name of this Buddha!

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 66.
rkt trans.

things and forms of life. Therefore their disconnect with their surroundings as well fellow human beings. This error occurs because human beings are blinded by greed, resentments and vanities. As of consequence, they keep transgressing things that are eternally sacred. Therefore they thoughtlessly keep desecrating timeless spiritual truths. As long as a person persists in this state of "ego-self working," such a person's thoughts, words and deeds remain most irrational, hurtful and harmful, if not most devastating and destructive.

Therefore, the First Noble Truth that Life is Full of Suffering is telling us that living one's life in the unenlightened mode of thoughtlessness means that one is being misled by an "ego-self working" desecrating things sacred and spiritual. The truth is that unenlightened human beings in the state of "unwisdom" are full of denials of things sacred and spiritual because of their "ego-selves working" day and night driven by blind passions and self vanities. This "ego-driven self," in fact, fails to dispel the problems of pain and suffering, for such a self stubbornly persists in pursuing its own pleasures and agendas at the expense of others, which then produces only more problems than solutions.

For this reason, as mentioned, an "awakening of true and real faith" has two sides much like the two sides to a single coin. This can be seen in the following words of Shinran,

"On the whole, I know nothing of good and evil, for were I to know good so thoroughly that the Tathagata also regards that as being good, then I would I know what good is. And were I to know evil so thoroughly that the Tathagata also regards that as being evil,

then I would know what evil is. However the truth is that we are all foolish beings, filled with evil and dwelling in a transient world, which is as fleeting as a burning house. Moreover, all things [of this transient world] without exception are false and devoid of any real substance. Nothing is true or real; only the Nembutsu is true and real." Ryukyo Fujimoto. *Shin Buddhim's Essence. The Tannisho*. p. 46.

Here, when Shinran says "only the Nembutsu is true and real," he is saying that the only life worth living is that life based on gratitude, reverence and especially a penitence in which one's "ego-self working" has been embraced "just as it is" by Amida Buddha without being condemned or rejected or obliterated or incinerated.

What this means is that the inhumanity in us by trusting and taking refuge in Amida Buddha can be "transformed" into acts of human generosity, kindness and compassion. This transformative process of "becoming so by itself of its own accord" is due to the virtues and powers of Amida Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion that have and yet continue to fully embrace all sentient beings within the Dharma World's Selflessness and Togetherness. This inseparable relationship between Amida and sentient beings are like icebergs melting in the ocean as they keep becoming the ocean's very waters and its free flowing currents.

This central tenet of Shin Buddhist teachings about "no ego-self working" is one of the most difficult of difficult things for a human being to accept because of her or his stubborn "ego-self working" attached and engrossed in its own self concerns and self gratifications in complete denial of things sacred and spiritual. To give up one's "ego-self working" enables one to become a person walking "the great path of unobstructed freedom" (T. Unno. *Tannisho* VII. p. 12). According to Shinran, to begin doing so is the most difficult of all difficulties that human beings can do.

This is why, according to Shinran, as long as one's "ego-self is working," it is impossible to untie the knots of ego-centrism as well as ethnocentrism for their beginnings and endings on one's rope of life are indeterminable and remain a mystery. This is because our lives are "inseparable" from the lives of those in the past as lives in the present keep connecting to the lives of others

who are yet to be born. Therefore the perennial questions, "Why was I born?" "Why must I die?" continue to baffle and mystify us as we are dying as we live and must live our lives till the last breath of our lives.

According to Shinran, it is only in having taken refuge in Amida's Selfless, All-embracing Primal Vow and by saying her Sacred Name does the life of gratitude and penitence "awakened" by power of the Other Power's Vows (*Tariki Hongan*). It is only by power of Amida's Primal Vow that one comes to live in humility and penitence and become free of one's "ego-self working" (*jiriki* = calculating and contriving). This is exactly why Shinran said: "in the nembutsu no self-working is true working; it is beyond description, explanation, and conceivability" (Unno. *Loc. cit.*, X. p. 16).

This also is why Shinran composed the following lines:

Concerning Amida's Primal Vow
that is the Nembutsu,
For sentient beings of evils,
false views, and vanities,
Extremely difficult is it for them
to believe and accept it;
Nothing is more difficult
than this difficulty!

Shoshinge. Lines 41-44.
rkt translation.

Indeed, to entrust one's "ego-self working" to the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness manifest as Amida's Primal Vow that also is her Sacred Name, this is truly a most difficult thing to do.

For most people are of the belief that "good people" are to be rewarded while "bad people" are to be punished. For such people it is most difficult to understand that "evil persons" as well as "good persons" are equally saved by Amida who is the ultimate manifestation of the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness in which all things and beings undeniably are in a Sacred Relationship of Oneness, or Inseparability.

The reason why it is difficult to see that all life is "interdependent" and "inseparable," said Shinran Shonin, is because:

"It is impossible for us, filled as we are with

blind passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever. Sorrowing at this, Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the attainment of Buddhahood by the person who is evil. Hence the evil person who entrusts himself to Other Power is precisely the one who possesses the true cause for birth." Dennis Hirota. *Tannisho: A Primer*. p. 24.

Indeed, for a person in whom an illusory "ego-self" is working, these words defy her or his sense of "righteousness" especially as based on her or his sense that only "good persons" deserve to go to a "heaven" while "evil persons" deserve to be cast into a fiery hell. The Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness informs us otherwise that what hurts others hurts also one's self as well as all things and all other forms of life. This is because all things and forms of life are in an inseparable, reciprocal relationship that is seamless, therefore, what affects one affects all others.

In persons whom "no ego-self is working" there is, therefore, the realization that:

"In our present lives, it is hard to carry out the desire to aid others however much love and tenderness we may feel; hence such compassion always falls short of fulfillment. Only the saying of the Name manifests the heart of great compassion; this is replete and thoroughgoing." *Loc. cit.* Ch. 4.

Therefore, according to Shinran, the saying of Nembutsu, as expressive of humility and penitence,

"... is neither a religious practice nor a good act. Since it is practiced without any calculation, it is 'non-practice.' Since it is also not a good created by my calculation, it is 'non-good.' Since it is nothing but Other Power, completely free of self-power, it is neither a religious practice nor a good act on the part of the practitioner." Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. VIII. p. 11.

According to Chinese Pure Land Master Shan'tao, this is because Amida Buddha in "watching solely over the sentient beings of the nembutsu, he grasps and never abandons them; hence he is called Amida." This is why Shinran uttered: "living in this impermanent world of burning house, all things are empty and vain; therefore, untrue. Only the

nembutsu is true, real, and sincere" (Unno. *Loc. cit.* Epilogue. p. 36).

This is why this world that is a "burning house" is fully part and parcel of the Pure Land of Amida. This is indicated by the *Shinran's Shoshin*

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Kay Ono

Nembutsu Ge as follows:

“Amida’s Mind forever shines as Light
constantly grasping and embracing
and always protecting us.
Piercing the dark clouds of ignorance
it illuminates to disperse
The mists of selfishness, desire, anger,
resentments and rage
That keep clouding and obscuring
the clear skies of True Faith above.
Such is the Dharma Sun above,
penetrating the dark clouds below
dispersing the very darkness
of the earth below!

Lines 29-34. rkt trans.

In a similar manner, when this Light illuminates the darkness in a person’s deepest consciousness, such a person’s “ego-self working” becomes naked and exposed by Amida’s Life of All-embracing Togetherness that has never or will ever abandon or condemn such a person riddled by karma.

Thus the following lines:

“Upon reception of this True Faith,
a person experiences Great Joy!
For instantaneously does s/he
leap right out crosswise
of the Five Evil Realms.
All mortal beings, ‘good’ and ‘bad,’
in hearing Tathagatha’s call
trust in Her Universal Vow,
The Buddhas all praise them
as beings of superior understanding.
They are called “lotus blossoms”
(that have emerged from a swamp).

Lines 35-40. rkt trans. () mine.

Let us then spend some quiet, quality spiritual time in solitude to reflect and ponder then on how deep, profound and inexplicable is Amida’s Unconditional Compassion that has never or will ever forsake or abandon any sentient being, including us human beings.

BUDDHIST PASSAGES OR STORIES

“If a man merely hears the true teaching but does not acquire it, he will fail in his search for

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enlightenment.” BDK – *The Teaching of Buddha*. (Eng.-Jpnse) p. 344.

QUESTION-ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What is *dukkha*?

ANSWER: *Dukkha* means “life is full of contradictions and paradoxes,” therefore full of suffering. *Dukkha* does not mean that “life equals suffering,” but it means that in order to begin walking the Buddhist path to enlightenment, one must deal with the actualities of sickness and aging, which is to realize that one is “dying as one is living” and also “one is living while one is dying” at the same time.

To say that “life is suffering” leads to pessimism, nihilism and fatalism because, then, one cannot do anything about it. Therefore, to recognize that “life is full of suffering” is to begin doing something about the underlying causes and reasons and turn one’s life into joy and happiness by leading a life of nonviolence, gratitude and penitence based on Amida’s Light of Wisdom and her Life of Compassion.