



# GASSHO

*"Hands together  
in reverence & gratitude"*



## November 2013

Issue: No: 11-13

### GRATITUDE, INGRATITUDE

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Experiencing gratitude, humility and genuine penitence in joy and gladness characterizes the life of a person who has completely entrusted her or his karma riddled self to the Dharma's Benevolent Truth of Selflessness by taking refuge in its beneficent Actuality of Togetherness. This Dharma has and continues to hold and embrace all things and life in an inseparable Oneness without condemnations or rejections. This Oneness is expressed as "one and yet many" and "many and yet one." In these senses, the Dharma is Truth and Reality at once are forever sacred and spiritual in the very midst of change and death as governed by the orderly laws of causality, conditionality, interdependency, inseparability and especially the facts of karmic consequences.

According to Shinran Shonin, the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness is manifest as Amida's Sacred Name that also is her Primal Vow. For in this Vow Amida vowed not to accept her final Buddhahood until the last unsavable sentient being had also attained her or his Buddhahood wherein all beings are equally enlightened Buddhas.

Therefore, according to Shinran Shonin:

"... **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 Tathagata. This Tathagata pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood." SBT-Series. *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*. p. 42.

### MONTH'S THOUGHT



"For each new morning with its light,  
For rest and shelter of the night,  
For health and food, for love and friends,  
For everything Thy goodness sends."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson



Here, the term "*Tathagata*" is especially significant in that Amida in having grasped sentient beings transforms their selfish hearts into humility and penitence concerning their mindless desecrations of the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and transgressions of its Actuality of Togetherness. There is remorse in the awakening. There is also great joy in the realization that for this very reason, one has never been rejected and abandoned by Amida.

For the term "*Tathagata*" refers none other than to Amida Buddha as being the very manifestation of the Dharma's Light of Wisdom that has and keeps dispersing the shadowy illusions in our minds and their subsequent dark delusions in our hearts until we come to clearly see that there are no distinctions or barriers between the world of sentient beings (*samsara*) and the World of Amida Buddha's Pure Land (or Nirvana Without Residues). Therefore, to be "enlightened" is to be free of all residues and traces of greed, resentments and vanities. Paradoxically, to have been "awakened" is to clearly see one's karma riddled self.

Therefore, Amida Buddha being the very manifestation of the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness

# REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SERVICES FOR NOVEMBER 2013

### 1st SUN Nov 3rd:

(Services cancelled)

**FUJINKAI MINI-Bazaar**  
9 a.m. to 12 noon  
(Social Hall)



### 2nd SUN Nov 10th:

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

### 3rd SUN Nov 17th:

### ANNUAL **SAMGHA MEMORIAL SERVICE**

9 A.M. English Service  
Guest Speaker:  
**Rev. Alan Urasaki**

### 4th SUN Nov 27th:

MONTHLY  
FAMILY WORSHIP  
9 A.M. Eng. Service  
“Dharma Talk”  
Rev. Tatsuguchi

## 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

## 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

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and its Actuality of its Togetherness in the formless form of Wisdom's very Light illuminates all things and life forms without discrimination in which all forms of life are in an "inseparable" sacred Oneness (*Ichinyo*) that should never be violated or desecrated. This illuminating Light also reveals sentient beings riddled by transgressions being embraced never to be rejected, condemned or abandoned.

Therefore, according to Shinran Shonin, to have undergone such an "awakening of genuine faith" is to have been "transformed" by the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness constantly being manifested as Amida's Light of Wisdom that is without discriminations, and, thereby, in having taken refuge in it to have become settled and embraced by the Dharma's Actuality of Togetherness that never has or will ever condemn or reject especially persons who are hopelessly riddled by karmic evils. However, if a person keeps taking his life and the life of others for granted, such a person, as of karmic consequence, keeps desecrating the Dharma and things of life. Such a person is lacking in penitence and feels that she or he is "entitled" to the things of life. For such a person presumes that she or he has a "God given right" to the things of life. Such a person is lacking in remorse or regrets in her insensitivities and thoughtlessness.

By contrast, Amida manifested herself as a Bodhisattva whose life and works were and continue to be working and dedicated to serve all sentient beings, especially us human beings full of failings and imperfections. This is why:

"Amida's Primal Vow does not discriminate between the young and old, good and evil; true entrusting alone is essential. The reason is that the Vow is directed to the being burdened with the weight of karmic

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## WORDS OF SHINRAN

"I, Shinran, have never even once uttered the nembutsu for the sake of my father and mother. The reason is that all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death...." Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. V p. 10.

evil and burning with the flames of blind passion." Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho* ... p. 3.

In having entrusted himself and having taken complete refuge in Amida Buddha as the Dharma's Beneficent Light of Wisdom full of Benevolent Life, Shinran Shonin then said:

"When I carefully consider the matter, my birth in the Pure Land is settled without doubt for the very reason that I do not rejoice at that which should have me bursting with joy. It is the working of blind passion which suppresses that heart that would rejoice and prevents it fullest expression. All this the Buddha already knew and called us foolish beings filled with blind passion; thus when we realize that the compassionate Vow of Other Power is for beings like ourselves, the Vow becomes even more reliable and dependable." Unno. *loc. cit.* IX. p. 14.

In these words of Shinran Shonin, it is to be especially noted that to be illuminated by the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness is to have one's transgressions of life and desecrations of Dharma laid bare and naked for one to see and reflect upon as a person fully grasped and embraced by Amida Buddha.

For in doing so one's moral pretensions and ethical presumptions begin to be completely exposed without judgments and condemnations. This awakening occurs when one comes to realize that just as the person of karmic transgressions and desecrations one is, one has and continues to be embraced by Amida Buddha never ever to be condemned, rejected or abandoned until one's final Buddhahood is attained upon passing into the Great Unknown Beyond.

Yuiembo, a follower of Shinran Shonin, said that Shinran constantly said:

"When I ponder on the compassionate vow of Amida, established through five kalpas of profound thought, it was for myself, Shinran, alone. Because I am a being burdened so heavily with karma, I feel even more deeply grateful to the Primal Vow which is decisively made to save me." Unno. *loc. cit. Epilogue.* p. 34.

Then Yuienbo also quotes the Chinese Pure Land Master Shan'tao as follows:

"Truly know that this self is a foolish being of karmic evil, repeating birth-and-death since beginningless aeons ago, forever drowning and wandering without ever knowing the path of liberation" *Ibid.*

Once again, these words of Shinran and Shan'tao remind us that we all are but mere mortal beings (*bombu*) who are "living and dying" as well as "dying and living" at the same time in this world of impermanence full of contradictions and paradoxes.

As Shinran said, we are all undeniably a "foolish being with blind passions, living in this impermanent world of burning house ..." in which "all things are empty and vain ..." (Unno. *loc. cit. Epilogue.* p. 3). Needless to say, those who persist to live in ingratitude are persons who are blatantly excessive, wasteful and, therefore, are unaware and in denial of their transgressions and desecrations.

Therefore, a person who has taken refuge in the powers and virtues of Amida Buddha's Sacred Name does not assume that she or he has the "right" to the things of life. Nor does she or he presume that she or he has been given a God right to exploit and utilize the things and creatures of his creations. Therefore, the uttering, saying, reciting, chanting and repeating of *namoh-amida-butsu* for such a person is not some kind of magical incantation or prayer to beseech a deity for some kind of personal advantage, benefit or miraculous intervention. Nor is it an imprecative prayer or some kind of exorcism.

According to Shinran Shonin, the Dharma's Selflessness appears as Amida's Clear Light of Wisdom that reveals things and life just as they

actually are and not as illusions or fabrications. Therefore, the Light of Dharma does not burn to incinerate one's transgressions or desecrations into ashes and oblivion. Quite the contrary, this Light of the Dharma's Selflessness exposes them for one's conscience to reflect upon then to transform them into a profound penitence full of gratitude and humility full of joy and gladness instead of guilt and fears. This is like the bitterness in persimmons being transformed into their very sweetness by power of the sun's radiance and warmth, or Wisdom's Truth and Compassion's Warmth.

Let us then delve into the undeniable fact that we human beings throughout history have and yet continue to take our lives for granted by our mindlessness and heartlessness. Though scientific, technological and medical advances have made our everyday lives even more convenient, comfortable and gratifying, we human beings still are basically creatures of sensation who are no different from our mammalian cousins in that we have to eat, drink, sleep, move about, procreate and go to the toilet if we are to survive and perpetuate the human species. Human beings, however, run the gamut of extremes between being selfless, kind and generous and being selfish, cruel, miserly and merciless. When living in heaven-like circumstances of wealth and opulence, human beings feel blessed and care free. When caught in hell-like situations when the amenities of life suddenly are obliterated, they feel damned and oppressed.

Now, the Buddhist principles of causality, conditionality and interdependency awaken the awareness that "one is inseparably connected and dependent to all things living and non-living, and especially dependent on the labor of countless other fellow human beings who we never ever get to know or meet." Karma, therefore, becomes of great significance. For karma has to do with the choices and decisions as to what kinds of thoughts, feelings, sentiments, goals and designs we individually and secretly choose to hold in our deepest consciousness that also have collective consequences.

These formless thoughts, feelings and intentions, though unseen, are constantly working in our subconsciousness. They become the very words we hear and the actual things we do in our conscious lives that bring about their inevitable physical effects as well as their psychological

affects that leave their indelible unseen marks or their visible scars. In today's world of instant communication and instant travel, because the unseen collective karma of others has taken on global consequences, human beings experience their instantaneous worldwide psycho-somatic ramifications.

Now the boundlessness of the universe is referred to as the "ten endless directions and regions of the universe," or what is the Dharma's World of All-encompassing Selflessness and All-embracing Togetherness whose fullness and depths are immeasurable and unfathomable, therefore, inconceivable and ineffable. This greater unbounded dimension, all-encompassing universe extends unseen yet beyond the visible blue of the skies above that is an infinite spherical universe without bounds that embraces all that there are in it "just as they are" without rejections or exclusions. This fullness embraces and includes this earth of ours that is but a mere grain of sand among the countless grains of sand on both banks of the Ganges River.

Amida Buddha has embraced all sentient beings, not just only human beings. The goal of Amida's Compassionate Vows is to equally share and benefit all sentient beings with the benefits of enlightenment throughout the boundless entire universe without prejudice or favoritisms. This fact speaks to the inseparability between Buddhas and human beings because the World of Dharma and the world of sentient beings are "one and yet two," "two and yet one" as well as "one and yet many" and "many and yet one." This fact of inseparability in Shin Buddhism is referred to as '*jiri rita enman*' or what is simultaneously "the benefiting of self that at once is also the benefiting of all others."

Let us then, once again, during this month of Thanksgiving, review some key Buddhist terms, concepts and phrases that deal with living the life of O-nembutsu gratitude and indebtedness full of penitence characterized by joy and gladness. The kanji compound *ho-on* (報恩) means to express gratitude and indebtedness for Amida's kindness and generosity that cannot be repaid in kind. When *ho-on* is used to express one's gratitude and indebtedness for Amida's Wisdom's Light and her Life of Compassion that has never or ever will forsake, condemn or reject a person, all the more then does she or he become aware of how impossible it is to repay Amida's kindnesses in kind.

## SHINRAN'S WASAN

The thought of the Buddhas'  
protecting and affirming  
all beings everywhere,  
This is due to consummation  
of the Diamond-like Heart;  
Those who have attained it  
should express gratitude  
to Amida Buddha as well as  
a profound indebtedness!  
*Jodo Wasan No. 85*  
rkt trans.

This is especially so for a person riddled by the negatives of one's karma.

In Jodoshinshu, or Shin Buddhism, the kanji *ho* and *on*, therefore, have very deep moral significance and spiritual meaning. For, as the human beings riddled as we are by the negatives of karma, all we can do is only acknowledge that we are unworthy recipients and beneficiaries of Amida Buddha's All-embracing Compassion that has never or ever will reject any sentient being, especially us human beings full of failings and imperfections.

Therefore, the Shin Buddhist understanding of *ho-on* (報恩) entails a profound sense of unrequitable gratitude and indebtedness for Amida's act of kindness and generosity. It is so profound that trying to express adequate gratitude or trying to repay Amida in kind is just not possible. For Amida's Compassion is unconditional, a gift with no strings attached.

One, therefore, can only express one's gratitude to Amida Buddha through what are the Four Indebtedness (*shi-on*) as follows:

1. One's profound Indebtedness to all forms of life — This explains why many Buddhists choose to be vegan or vegetarian: in order to honor the life of all living creatures. Vegetarian Buddhists refrain from eating meat because it means a living creature's life needs to be taken.
2. One's profound indebtedness to one's father and mother — This should be no surprise for it was because of one's parents one was

born as a human being endowed with the "five powers of conscience," the powers to feel remorse, gratitude, to reason, to be compassionate and to contemplate things sacred and spiritual.

3. One's profound indebtedness to one's Sovereign — In our times, "sovereign" means those who serve in important roles of governing and maintaining law and order in one's country.
4. One's profound indebtedness to the Three Treasures — The Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness are universal and not the monopoly of any one man, race or religion. Those who teach the Dharma are Buddhas and those who live and abide in the Dharma are the Sangha or the Universal Brotherhood and Sisterhood of all mankind.

According to the *Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra*, the first of the Four Profound Indebtedness concerns the debt of gratitude that we owe to all living beings and our fellow human beings, many of whom we never get to see or get to know in our lives. Were it not for their work, contributions and sacrifices, it would be impossible to live the lives that we are living.

The second Profound Indebtedness concerns our gratitude owed to our father and mother for having conceived and brought us into this life as an intact human infant with a conscience. This indebtedness then extends to all our ancestral fathers and mothers. According to the Buddha, it is impossible, therefore, to fully repay our countless ancestral parents for all they did in kind for their children over the passing generations.

The third Profound Indebtedness concerns gratitude owed to one's sovereign, or those who are in charge of maintaining the harmony and peace, well being of a nation's citizens. A wise and far seeing ruler or legislator enables the citizens of their nation to be free and happy. Such a ruler or legislator is a true Dharma King (*Chakravartin*), or a King who rules by the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness.

The fourth Profound indebtedness concerns one's unrequitable indebtedness to the Three Treasures, or the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness as constantly manifest and promulgated by Buddhas coming and

going as Bodhisattvas teaching the eightfold way. Amida Buddha is such a Buddha who also appeared as a Bodhisattva to fulfill her Vows to become the very Light of Wisdom and Life of Compassion that awakens a person's "true and real faith." This "awakening" to The Three Treasures involves the realization "that all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death." Thus, individuals who take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha comprise the Brotherhood and Sisterhood of all mankind. The Samgha guided by Buddhas constantly manifest the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of All-embracing Togetherness.

For this reason, as often mentioned, the *Ullambana Sutta* states that a family at least on the fifteenth day of July should hold a memorial O'Bon service to express gratitude to all their ancestral fathers and mothers over a minimum of seven past generations. However, a family naturally is inclined to remember only their parents and ancestors just for two past generations. However, over a mere seven generations, there had to be 127 fathers and 127 mothers, 254 individuals each from different families. The fact is that if any one of them were missing, we would not be here now.

Therefore, the *Fuboo On'ju Gyo*, or *Sutra on Our Profound Indebtedness to Our Ancestral Fathers and Mothers*, relates of how we are indebted to the Buddhas throughout the universe who invested the Dharma's Virtues of Selflessness and Togetherness in us at the very moment of our conception when our father's "white seed" impregnated our mother's "red seed in season." It was in the very moment of our conception that we were gifted with a conscience and began becoming a human person to be finally born. This Sutra then elaborates how profound yet is our unrequitable indebtedness especially for all our ancestral moms for having carried us to full completion in their very wombs, to then bond with us by breast feeding us over the next two to three years of our infancy with mother's milk.

Therefore, the *Great Collection Sutra* states:

"Suppose that, the last of the five five-hundred-year periods, there should be someone who harasses unlearned monks without precepts by accusing them of some offense. You should know that this person

is extinguishing the great torch of Buddhism."

Therefore, the debt owed to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha also is most difficult to fully requite and repay in kind. This is because, if the Dharma Teachings of Selflessness and Togetherness did not exist then there would be no Buddhas who spread the virtues and benefits of the Three Treasures or persons of faith and conscience expressing a profound indebtedness and gratitude for life.

To be indebted (報 - *ho*) then is not to take one's life for granted. It is to refrain from a life of excessiveness and wastefulness. Such a sense of profound indebtedness is an important part of one's spiritual transformation by an awakening of true and real faith. For to entrust one's self to the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness is to have been taken in and embraced by Amida Buddha as the very manifestation of the Dharma's Reality of Togetherness. To realize that one will never be rejected or condemned awakens one's gratitude. This gratitude deepens and turns into a sense of unrequitable indebtedness (恩).

This transformation of gratitude into indebtedness occurs when one has been grasped by Amida's Great Heart of Compassion that has never or will ever forsake, condemn, reject or abandon karma riddled sentient beings until they all attain Buddhahood. This then is the profound meaning of the phrase "to express gratitude and indebtedness to Amida Buddha as a person never to be ever abandoned until one comes to attain her or his ultimate Buddhahood."

Below are some quotes about gratitude on a mundane level by people we know. They help us deepen our thinking about what in Jodoshinshu is a gratitude that becomes one's profound indebtedness. The quotes are:

1. "Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom." —Marcel Proust
2. "We can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures." —Thornton Wilder
3. As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. —John F. Kennedy
4. At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person.

Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us. —Albert Schweitzer

5. The deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated. —William James
6. "Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough." —Oprah Winfrey
7. "He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices

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## Donations

for those which he has." —Epictetus

Now, it is interesting to note that Melanie Greenberg, a clinical psychologist, in discussing "how to begin bringing gratitude into your life," says that you can do so by meditating on all the things in your own life that help you to bring and give you pleasure such as showing your gratitude to your friends and family by writing cards and exchanging thoughtful, personal gifts, or by sharing food with the poor in this country where there is an over abundance of food that is often wasted. Clearly, however, even such well-intentioned expressions of gratitude are indicative of what Shinran Shonin says are expressions of gratitude tainted by an "ego-self working" which is not that of a "no ego self working" that is a "true self working" fully aware of one's undeservingness and unworthiness of being a recipient and beneficiary of Amida's All-embracing Compassion that is unrequitable.

Trusting and taking refuge in Amida as manifestation of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness, therefore, leads to an acknowledgment of one's unworthiness and undeservingness as a recipient and beneficiary of Amida Buddha's no strings attached Unconditional Compassion that mysteriously transforms one's heart by rewiring one's brain to fire and awaken a humility and penitence free of fears and anxieties in the full realization that:

"In this life no matter how much pity and sympathy we may feel for others, it is impossible to help another as we truly wish; thus our compassion is inconsistent and limited. ..." Unno. *loc. cit.* IV p. 9.

Such then is the underlying significance of Jodoshinshu faith in which the limitations of being all too human are duly recognized in one's mundane expressions of gratitude wherein one's shortcomings and failings are faced squarely and fully addressed without excuses of one's imperfections, denials and failings.

## **BUDDHIST STORY OR PASSAGE**

"Those who always observe filial piety by showing respect, love and concern for their parents, should leave everything to Amida Buddha. We have grown, we have attained adulthood, we

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have conceived the desire to be born in the Pure Land and have the chance to recite 'Namu Amida Butsu.'"

"None of this could have occurred without the parents who raised us...." From Honen Shonin's *Words of Instruction to a Devotee*.

## **QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER**

QUESTION: What is the meaning of *Sangha*?

ANSWER: Generally, Sangha refers to the relationship between monks and nuns to the general populace among who they live, as follows:

"While monks feed their lay brethren and sisters with spiritual food, the latter on their part supply the former with material food and other necessities of life. The latter are bound to the former for their material support. ... monks ... must resort to their lay friends for help...." S. Tachibana. *The Ethics of Buddhism*. p. 230.