



GASSHO

January

2014

Issue No: 01-14

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



Happy New Year!

2014 IS OUR CENTENNIAL YEAR

Shinshu Kyokai heralds its centennial with a look back to a *Neubutsushiki* parade, with Rev. Untai Toshima and Rev. Jyakujo Takeda (lower left), from the Aloha Lane *judo-ba* to 1014 Kaheka Lane. Photo courtesy Katsumi Kaneshige.

MONTH'S THOUGHT



Learning from our past mistakes, we must, in each ongoing moment, do our very best to maintain loving relationships to ensure the happiness and well-being of others and those yet to be born in the future. — Wasui



NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

A Happy New Year to you all from my wife Sumiko and I. We extend our Best Wishes for a Happy New Year to you all with our traditional Japanese New Year greetings: "*kinga shinnen*," meaning, may this year be full of happiness for you, "*shinnen akemashite o-medeto-gozaimasu*," meaning, with the dawning light of New Year's Day may endless joy fill your lives, and "*kotoshimo yoroshiku o-negai shimasu*," meaning, hoping for your continued good will and support for our temple and its various activities.

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR JANUARY 2014

New Year's Day **Wednesday, Jan 1st:**

10 A.M. English Service

1st SUN Jan 5th:

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

2nd SUN Jan 12th:

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

3rd SUN Jan 19th:

GOSHOOKI HOONKO

9 A.M. English service

Speaker:

Rev. Roland Tatsuguchi

***“Words of Shinran
To Live By”***

4th SUN Jan 26th:

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

Mrs. Agnes Tomie Saito
86 yrs. Dec. 11, 2013

THANK YOU
for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

2014 Memorial Service Schedule

2013	1 Year	2012	3 Year	2008	7 Year
2002	13 Year	1998	17 Year	1990	25 Year
1982	33 Year	1965	50 Year	1915	100 Year

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This year 2014 is an election year that yet continues to be full of political theatrics and "politics as usual." More importantly, this year is Shinshu Kyokai's centennial year. For me this year 2014 is even more significant for it is a Horse year. I was born in 1930, a Horse year. I was delivered by a midwife at 1014 Aloha Lane (now Kaheka Street). The place now is part of the Pawaa Neighborhood District Park.

According to the Chinese Zodiac Calendar 1930 was the year of the Metal Horse. Horse years occur in 12-year cycles. So the years 1930, 1942, 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, and 2002 were Horse Years. This year 2014 will be the "Year of the Wood Horse." There are three others, the Fire Horse, Earth Horse and Water Horse. So on the first of November this year, I will be 84 years old. Seven 12-year cycles have passed in my life. With the passing of another 12 years I will be 96 years old in 2026.

The origin of Zodiacs are to be found in the observations by ancients of celestial bodies, the changing seasons and the renewal of flora and fauna each Spring. The number 12 is divisible by four and three which are also of spiritual significance. A year is comprised of 12 months. There are 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of total darkness in a moonless night. A full night and day has 24 hours. Ancients especially noted that every 29.53 days a full moon appears. So, Zodiacal signs have their origins in the observations of ancients who saw the earth as the center of the universe around which other visible celestial bodies revolved. The sun, moon, the morning and evening stars were all seen moving across the sky. Ancients were especially fascinated by certain clusters and patterns of the stars in the night sky.

The difference between western and eastern Zodiacal systems is seen in the ancient myths such

GASSHO is the Monthly Newsletter of
SHINSHU KYOKAI MISSION of HAWAII
1631 S. Beretania Street, Honolulu, Hawaii,
96826-1105. Temple 973-0150.

Editor: Rev. R.K. Tatsuguchi.
Circulation: SKM Staff.

PUBLICATION DATE: December 26, 2013

WORDS OF SHINRAN

... The aspiration for Buddhahood is none other than the wish to save all beings. This wish to save all beings is the wish to carry all beings across the great ocean of birth-and-death. This shinjin is the aspiration to bring all beings to the attainment of supreme nirvana; it is the heart of great love and great compassion. ... SBT-Series. *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone.* p. 46.

as in Sakyamuni Buddha's auspicious birth and peaceful death where celestial deities, earthly gods, demonic beings and more importantly, even things such as plants, flowers, birds and animals all came to revere, and pay homage to the Buddha upon his glorious birth as well as upon his passing serenely into the Great Unknown Beyond.

So, it is not surprising to further come across Chinese fables about the Buddha asking all the animals to meet him on New Year's Eve to re-affirm their faith in the Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness wherein all things living and non-living were, are and continue to forever be in a relationship that is seamless and inseparable in which all things are perceived as most sacred and spiritual.

Now, according to the fable, only twelve animals came. So the Buddha named a year after each one of them. Thus the Chinese Zodiac contains the names of the twelve animals that came. The twelve were the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. The traits, proclivities and inclinations of each animal are believed to characterize a person's nature who is born in the year named after the animal. The positive and negative characteristics of each animal are also given and listed.

Now, it is to be noted that the Zodiac in the East such as in Vedic and Chinese ones differ from European ones. Western ones are based on the configuration of stars and the paths taken by celestial bodies such as the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and stars in the night sky in specific position and time. Therefore, the meanings of the Western Zodiacs are based on an "imaginary belt" or configurations of certain position of astral

constellations and their perceived patterns extending on either side of the Sun as they pass in the sky from East to West. The twelve astral constellations are: Aries (Mars), Taurus (Venus), Gemini (Mercury), Cancer (Moon), Leo (Sun), Virgo (Mercury), Libra (Venus), Scorpio (Pluto), Sagittarius (Jupiter), Capricorn (Saturn), Aquarius (Uranus) and Pisces (Neptune), which are not the terrestrial creatures of the earth as depicted in the Chinese Zodiac. They take on anthropomorphic forms such as the god Zeus or the goddess Venus.

According to the Chinese Zodiac, people like myself born in the Horse Years are supposed to have the following qualities that I find lacking in myself. Horse Year People are supposed to be "smart, fabulous speakers who have a gift for words getting through to bond with other people." This is like the Hindus who believe that the cow is sacred and the elephant is majestic and indomitable. The Chinese, similarly, see the Horse to be a symbol of nobility, dignity, speed, energy and perseverance." The Chinese Zodiac begins with the Year of the Snake. In Chinese folklore the mythical Dragon symbolizes Wisdom and Good Fortune. Chinese culture and civilization are rooted more in Mother Earth, therefore in matters practical and realistic.

In the eye of human beings different colors and their varying hues as well as specific shapes and forms have a great influence and affect as to how they see and react to things as well as regard people by their shapes and color of their skin. In the "mind's eye" colors and appearances can be auspicious or inauspicious. People are affected by a person's "attractiveness" or "repulsiveness" as well as by the complexion of their skin.

In traditional Chinese astral physics the colors red, black, blue-green, white and yellow correspond to the five basic elements of water, fire, wood, metal and earth. So, in our superficial perceptions of others we say such things as she was "green" with envy or he was "red" with anger and rage. We also tend to judgmentally see "white" to be pure and virtuous and "black" to be impure and sinister. Historically, we see this in the presumptions of white supremacists who see people of color as being their inferiors.

By contrast, the tendency in Dharmic religions is to focus on man's "inseparability" with the universe, especially that his very "survival" depends on the very things of Mother Earth whether

it be in the light of day or in the dark of night. This interconnection and inseparability between the universe, earth, flora, fauna and man can be seen in the words of Shinran as follows:

"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 the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood." SBT-Series. *Notes of Essentials of Faith Alone*. p. 42.

These words of Shinran clearly show that all things without rejection are fully contained and sustained within the very contexts of Nirvana that is itself a boundless sphere comprised of the ten endless directions and regions. Therefore, everything is of cosmic and terrestrial significance because all things animate and inanimate are fully contained in and sustained in the universe that is an unfathomable sphere, a network of interconnected elements and life forms.

Interestingly, each Zodiacal sign also comprises a 30-degree segment of time and space. Twelve times 30 degrees makes 360 degrees, a full circle of time and space which is also a complete cycle of time and space of inseparable circles and spheres.

Because this year 2014 is a Horse Year, I feel that this year will be a good year for Shinshu Kyokai. This is because, as mentioned, the Chinese Zodiac says "horses" are quick-witted, extroverted, intelligent, practical-minded, sharp, quick to pick up new skills and able to handle many tasks at the same time.

However, there is a caveat. Like galloping horses, human beings often become overzealous and charge into a situation like stampeding horses. In doing so, they often become trapped in a dead-end canyon. Or worse yet, driven off the edge of a cliff to their deaths.

Nevertheless, people born in Horse Years are said to be trustworthy, open-minded, friendly, reliable and dependable. They are said to be friends who are honest with you. Although Horse Year people can be outgoing, they can also be like solitary

elephants. They tend to be self-reliant and independent and very much enjoy moments of being alone (reflective, contemplative and meditative).

Nevertheless, according to the Chinese Zodiac, Horse Year people can also become stubborn, resistant and rebellious like a wild stallion flaring up in tantrums whenever it doesn't get its way. They can be like placid elephants that can suddenly become raging and wild elephants as well.

Now, the redeeming point about Horse Year people is that they also come to feel much regret and remorse after their temper tantrums subside. In doing so, they become docile, humble and penitent. Concerning this tendency, human beings likewise possess the potential of becoming transformed by remorse and penitence into persons of kindness and gentleness.

This then is the paradoxical significance of Shinran's words as follows:

"... Under the influence of our karmic past we human beings will do anything." T. Unno. *Tannisho*. XIII. p. 24.

In other words, given the circumstances, a person can either become loving or hateful and even an ally or an enemy. The person who is fully aware that she or he can become hurtful and hateful or helpful and healing, such a person is undergoing a "transformation." Such a person is like a wild horse that is being tamed but not a horse whose spirit is being broken to become a beast of burden. Such then is the significance of Amida's Wisdom and her Compassion that fully embraces sentient beings without condemning or rejecting them.

Therefore, according to Shinran, a person of true and real faith is a person who has "become fully awake" that she or he undeniably is a mere mortal riddled by blind passions and self vanities. And this is why she or he has been grasped never ever to be condemned and rejected.

Such a person has become fully "aware" that:

"The Primal Vow was established out of deep compassion for us who cannot be freed from the bondage of birth-and-death through any religious practice, due to the abundance of evil passion. Since its basic intention is to

SHINRAN'S WASAN

How lamentable that
both monks and laity
in today in determining
auspicious days and times,
Implore celestial gods
and earthly deities
And are engaged in
magical rituals
and divinations!

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 101
rkt – trans.

effect the enlightenment of such an evil one, the evil person who entrusts himself to Other Power is truly the one who attains birth in the Pure Land. Thus, even the good person attains birth, how much more so the evil person." Unno. *loc. cit.*, III. p. 8.

These words of Shinran clearly speak of a person who has been made fully aware of the "inseparability" between the World of Buddhas and the world of sentient beings in which hopelessly karma riddled persons have been grasped never ever to be condemned, rejected and abandoned.

For this very reason Amida Buddha arose from the Timeless World of Dharma to appear in the world of sentient beings to grasp and embrace them all, especially the ones hopelessly riddled by their implacable karmic transgressions and desecrations. For Amida as the Bodhisattva Dharmakara then vowed never to forsake, condemn, reject or abandon any sentient being until the last one of them was brought to her or his full enlightenment and Ultimate Buddhahood.

Thus, the significance of this "inseparable connection" between the World of Buddhas and the world of sentient beings was consummated as a "bond for all times." This bond between Amida and man was established by the Bodhisattva Dharmakara who, by consummating his Forty-eight Vows of All-embracing Compassion, in the form of *Namoh-Amida-Butsu* uttered his Sacred Name easily in gratitude, humility, especially a penitence.

Once again, as a sequel to last December's GASSHO, allow me to continue quoting the words

of Sakyamuni Buddha and Shinran Shonin for your reflections and edifications for 2014. They are as follows:

"As the bee collects nectar and departs without injuring the flower or its scent, so let a sage go about a village."

"Nor the perversities of others, nor what they have done or left undone should a sage take notice of."

"Like a beautiful flower, full of color, but without scent, are the fair but fruitless words of him who does not act accordingly."

"Like a beautiful flower, full of color and full of scent, are the pure and beautiful words of him who acts accordingly." Babbit. *op. cit.* IV. pp. 10, 11.

"Fools of little understanding are their own greatest enemies, for they do evil deeds which must bear bitter fruits."

"As long as the evil deed done does not bear fruit, the fool thinks it is like honey; but when it ripens, then the fool suffers grief." Babbit. *op. cit.*, V. pp. 12, 13.

"Beware of bodily anger, and control the body! Leave the sins of the body, and with thy body practice virtue."

"Beware of the anger of the tongue, and control thy tongue! Beware the sins of the tongue and practice virtue with thy tongue!"

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

"The steadfast who control body, tongue, and mind are indeed well controlled." Babbit. *op. cit.*, XVII. p. 37.

"He who destroys life, who speaks untruth, who in this world takes what is not given him, who goes to another man's wife;"

"And the man who gives himself to drinking intoxicating liquors, he, even in this world, digs up his own root." Babbit. *op. cit.*, XVIII. P. 39.

Therefore, said Sakyamuni Buddha:

"The best of ways is the eightfold; the best of truths the four sayings; the best of states passionless; the best of men he who has eyes to see."

"This is the way, there is no other that leads

to purity of vision. Go on this way! So shall ye confound Mara (the tempter)." Babbit. *op. cit.*, XX. P. 42.

Let us now look at some words of Shinran Shonin as quoted by Yuiembo in the Tannisho as follows:

"When the thought of saying the nembutsu emerges decisively from within, having entrusted ourselves to the inconceivable power of Amida's vow which saves us, enabling us to be born in the Pure Land, in the very moment we receive the ultimate benefit of being grasped never to be abandoned." Unno. *op. cit.*, I. p. 5.

"... all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death. ..." Unno. *op. cit.*, V. p. 10.

"If the karmic condition is to come together we shall be together; if the karmic condition is to be separated, we shall be separated. ..." Unno. *op. cit.*, VI. p. 11.

"Do not take poison just because there is an antidote." Unno. *op. cit.*, XIII. p. 24.

To reinforce these words, Shinran in *Shinran's Letters* wrote as follows:

"... Truly know, therefore, that without any differentiation between good and bad people, and regardless of one's having a heart of blind passion, all beings are certain to attain birth. And so, as Sakyamuni has taught, in the very moment that we possessed of ignorance and blind passion are born into the Buddha Land of Peace, we attain the supreme enlightenment." SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 1. p. 23.

"... Amida's Vow is, from the very beginning, designed to have each person entrust himself in namu-amida-butsu and be received in the Buddha Land; none of this is through the practitioner's calculation! Thus, there is no room for him to be concerned with his being good or bad. ..." *Op. cit.*, Letter 5. p. 29.

Consequently, this is why, said Shinran:

"... Sakyamuni and Amida are our parents

of great compassion; using many and various compassionate means, they awaken the supreme shinjin. Thus the settling of true shinjin is the working of Sakyamuni and Amida. A person becomes free of doubt about his birth because he has been grasped. Once grasped, there should be no calculation whatsoever. Since he dwells in the stage of non-retrogression until being born into the Buddha Land, he is said to be in the stage of the truly settled.

"... The statement, 'one will realize nirvana,' means that when the heart of the person of true and real shinjin attains the fulfilled Buddha Land at the end of his present life he becomes one with the light that is the heart of Tathagata, for his reality is immeasurable life and his activity is **inseparable** from immeasurable light. ..."

Letter 14. p. 44. In bold for emphasis.

This is because, said Shinran,

"... Shinjin is wisdom. This wisdom is the wisdom attained because we are grasped by the light of Other Power. The Buddha's light is also wisdom. Thus, we can say that the person of shinjin and the Tathagata are the same. "Same" means that, in shinjin they are equals. ... Since the person rejoices in shinjin, he is said to be the same as the Tathagata." Letter 14. p. 48. Underlined for emphasis.

Therefore,

"Whether one is left behind or goes before, it is surely a sorrowful thing to be parted by death. But the one who first attains nirvana vows without fail to save those who were close to him first and leads those with whom he has been karmically bound, his relatives and his friends. ..." Letter 14. p. 49.

These words of Shinran quoted above more or less summarize what the life based on gratitude, humility and penitence is all about. Such a life of faith is full of penitence and full of joy in the realization that it is precisely because one is a karma-riddled being, she or he has been unconditionally grasped by Amida never ever to be condemned, judged, abandoned to be forever rejected. Such is the virtue of Amida's Benevolence for all beings.

However, in Letter 15 we are warned about our presumptions that we can "awaken faith" on our own spiritual powers based on our good works and spiritual practices. To think and believe that one's good works are perfectly pure and genuine, such a presumption is an error of great karmic

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Donations

ramifications, according to Shinran.

Furthermore, in Letter 16, Shinran points out as to why it is most appalling that there are some teachers who encourage their followers to intentionally commit evils by thinking, saying and doing whatever they please. This is because such teachers say that because Amida Buddha has vowed to especially save those hopelessly riddled by evils, to be saved one should deliberately commit evils so one can be saved.

To correct this heresy, Shinran wrote as follows:

“If a person justifying himself by saying he is a foolish being, can do anything he wants, then is he also to steal or to murder? Even that person inclined to steal will naturally undergo a change of heart if he comes to say the nembutsu aspiring for the Buddha Land. Yet people who show no such sign are being told that it is permissible to do wrong; this should never occur under any circumstances.” Letter 16. pp. 51, 52.

Here, Shinran apparently was responding to his son Zenran’s heresy. For he wrote:

“It is deplorable that you have told people to abandon themselves to their heart’s desire and to do anything they want. One must seek to cast off the evil of this world and to cease doing wretched deeds; this is what it means to reject the world and to live the nembutsu. When people who may have pronounced the nembutsu for many years abuse others in word or deed, there is no indication of rejecting this world. ...” *Ibid.*

For this reason, such people who rationalize their doing of deliberate evils, such people are to be avoided for they need not be in our lives who are seeking to live the life of O-nembutsu based on one’s penitence and gratitude to Amida.

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

People who recognize what’s enough—can sleep on the ground and think it’s fine. People who do not recognize what’s enough—can be in the halls of heaven and still not be satisfied. — Sakyamuni Buddha

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QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: I have seen performance of rituals and practices in Buddhist temples that appear to be magical and superstitious. Are such things permissible?

ANSWER: According to the *Jodoshinshu Handbook for Laymen*,

“Buddhism disavows as superstition that which is not in accord with the law of karma. All prayers of supplication, fortune telling, soothsaying, witchcraft and the like that cater to the lust of egoistic desires of man are categorically rejected in Jodoshinshu.” (p. 69)

In the gatha book, *Praises of Buddha*, the goal of the Eightfold Path is:

“To keep ourselves free from prejudice, superstition, and delusion, and to seek to understand the true nature of life.” (p. 149)

This is why Shinran lamented about monks and laity in his day who also engaged in magical and superstitious rituals and supernatural practices.

(See SHINRAN’S WASAN.)