



# GASSHO

March  
2014

Issue No: 03-14

*"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"*



## FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS AND EIGHTFOLD NOBLE PATH

By rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

As a sequel to February's GASSHO, I would like to reflect further on the Four Noble Truths. The first truth reveals the reality that our world is "full of suffering." And yet it is ultimately inseparable from the Dharma World's Selflessness and Togetherness. This insight is obtained through what is the Right Contemplation on Amida Buddha (Chinese: *nien'po*, Japanese: *nembutsu*). Shinran came to the Right Knowing of Amida through the "Right Contemplation" on Amida's All-embracing Compassion that has never rejected to abandon the world of sentient beings, especially the "unsavable ones" in the realm of human beings.

For these reasons the Noble Eightfold Path, especially paths three through six, are not commandments. The reason being that the eight paths are based on the orderly and uniform principles of causality, conditionality, interdependency, inseparability, and especially the karmic consequences as constantly being generated by the thoughts, feelings, desires and intentions of human beings that are expressed through the very words they say and the things they keep mindlessly and thoughtlessly doing. Karma, as of consequence, concerns the fact that once a word has been spoken or a deed done, their consequences cannot be reversed or nullified.

This is why Shinran Shonin declared:

"The attainment of Buddhahood through the *nembutsu*, this is Shinshu, the 'True Teachings.' This Teaching is ... the store of awakening ... the sudden teaching within the sudden teaching. Gutoku Shinran, *Nyushutsu nimon geju*, in *Shinran chosaku zenshu*, ed. by Kaneko Daiei Kyoto: Hozokan, 1964, 399-400.

## MONTH'S THOUGHT



"When I began to study Zen, mountains were mountains; when I thought I understood Zen, mountains were not mountains; but when I came to full knowledge, mountains were again mountains." — A Zen Master's words in D.T. Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism*. p. 288.



What these words mean is that when a person truly utters *Namoh-amida-butsu* (*nen'butsu*) in deep trust, such a person suddenly or gradually experiences a complete transformation of her or his ingratitude into gratitude, irreverence into humility and impertinence into penitence. Such a "transformation" cannot be accomplished through one's own religious aspirations and spiritual practices. Such a "transformation" can occur only when one has absolutely trusted and taken unwavering refuge in Amida Buddha's Light of Wisdom and Life of Compassion.

Most of us, because of our thoughtlessness and mindlessness, reside in denial of Sakyamuni Buddha's dictum that "all things are impermanent" (*sarva dhamma annica*). However, most of us continue to live as though "there will always be a tomorrow" for us. Therefore, we are not truly aware of the fact that we are actually dying as we are living, and dying as we are living with each second that is ticking by. As Rennyō Shōnin in his *Epistle on the Whitish-grey of Bones and Ashes* (*Hakkotsu no Gobun Sho*) said: "It is most urgent that we concern ourselves with the 'grave matters of the

*continues on p. 4*

# REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SERVICES FOR MARCH 2014

### 1ST SUN Mar 2nd:

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

### 2ND SUN Mar 9th:

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

### 3RD SUN Mar 16th:

#### Spring O'Higan Service

9 A.M. Eng. Service  
Speaker:  
Rev. Hidehito Sakamoto

### 4TH SUN Mar 23rd:

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

### 5TH SUN Mar 30th:

MONTHLY  
FAMILY WORSHIP  
9 A.M. Eng Service  
Dharma Talk 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**  
Tuesday 9 a.m. - noon

*With Deepest Sympathy*

Mrs. Peggy Ishitani  
89 yrs. Jan 12, 2014

**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	33Year	1965	50 Year	1915	100 Year

*continued on p. 7*

# REV. SAKAMOTO'S CORNER

phone 220-3702 hidehito128@gmail.com

## With the Shinran Shonin Statue

Rev. Hidehito Sakamoto

Hello everyone! It is so nice to meet you! My name is Hidehito Sakamoto from Shiga prefecture of Japan. Do you know where Shiga is? Shiga is located almost in the center of Japan, next to Kyoto. Shiga has the biggest lake in Japan, Lake Biwa. Besides Lake Biwa, there are Hikone Castle, Nagahama Castle, Azuchi Castle, Hyakusaiji Temple, Enryakuji Temple, Sugatani Hotspring, and Omi Hotspring. These are a few of the many places to sightsee in Shiga.

There are also many delicious foods to eat in Shiga. Especially Omi beef and Ayu (a sweet fish) are famous in Shiga. I wish all of you could taste them. There is also a special food of Shiga, but you need to be brave to eat this. Funazushi! This is a very old style of Japanese sushi. It is stacked in a bottle for 1-2 years. When we take it out of the bottle, it has a very strong smell. Some people say it is rotten. But it is not rotten. It is just like we make Japanese sake from rice! With funazushi, some people love it and become a big fancier of it. But others cannot bear the smell and cannot eat it. I wish you could try funazushi at least once.

I am from a very unique place with complex cultures. So if you have a chance to visit Japan, I would like to recommend that you visit my home town of Shiga.

I have been assigned to the Shinshu Kyokai Temple since February. I don't know Hawaiian customs and culture at all. So I beg for your support and help. Please teach me Hawaiian ways! I look forward to learning everything.

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: February 26, 2013

On my coming to this temple, Shinshu Kyokai, I have one thing that I want to tell you. When I was deciding to come to Shinshu Kyokai, I spoke with Mrs. Charlotte Mukai and exchanged information. I happened to find out a strange thing. Mrs. Mukai told me that Shinshu Kyokai is planning to install a Shinran Shonin statue as the temple's 100 year anniversary event. And she told me that she ordered Kinjudo to make the statue. When I heard the name Kinjudo, an electric shock went through my body. Kinjudo is very near my home temple in Japan. When I heard that, I felt really close to Shinshu Kyokai.

When I was in Japan, I was very interested in antiques and art. I often visited one of my temple members, Mr. Tomio Shimizu. Mr. Shimizu is a great artist, and when I visited his house, we used to talk about art for a long time. Sometimes, the talk lasted until midnight. And before we knew it, Mr. Shimizu and I became good friends.

When I went back to Japan in January, I visited Kinjudo and talked with the president, Mr. Ochi. He told me that Mr. Tomio Shimizu's Shinran statue had only been sent overseas one time before. The first time, it was sent to Taiwan. And the second time, it will be sent to Hawaii. To Shinshu Kyokai! When I found out these things, I realized a strange and wonderful connection was made by Amida Buddha and our ancestors. My good friend, Mr. Shimizu, is a great artist and he made many Shinran statues and Kinjudo had sent them all over Japan. But Kinjudo had sent his work overseas to Taiwan only. And now, the second overseas statue is coming here to Shinshu Kyokai. For me, I cannot think this is a simple coincidence. Rather, I believe that Amida Buddha is teaching me something through this experience. This is interdependence and connectedness. I believe I have to treasure En (connection) because what is happening now is based on the kind hearts and compassion of Amida Buddha and our ancestors. To feel their hearts is the teaching, and to live according to their will is our nembutsu path. As a minister, I want to show gratitude to Amida Buddha and our ancestors and keep listening to their voiceless voices forever.

Namo Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu,  
Namu Amida Butsu

continued from p. 1

afterlife.” Since life is an ever revolving “perfect circle” in which the past, present and future are seamless, we need to become aware of the actuality that over the passing generations we all have been and continue to be fathers and mothers, as well as brothers and sisters to each other — meaning that we are all related.

Therefore, Buddhists need to be aware of and live by the Four Noble Truths. The First Truth is the undeniable fact that life is full of suffering. The Second Truth is that to each difficulty there are underlying causes and reasons. The Third Truth is that if the actual causes and real reasons of a problem are not pinpointed, then the proper cure and method of treatment cannot be formulated and applied to cure the illness or resolve the problem. The Fourth Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path, a comprehensive solution formulated by Sakyamuni Buddha to cure and solve man’s mental-emotional, moral-ethical and spiritual-religious problems in the realization that a person’s mind, body and conscience are seamless and inseparable, one from the other two.

Paths three through six involve what are the minimal Five Precepts for Buddhist laity to uphold and live by. Here, it is most important to make very clear that “precepts” are not “commandments.” For a commandment, if disobeyed, brings down the wrath and vengeance of a deity on those who do not obey and uphold them. (See Numbers 29:1-9.)

Sakyamuni Buddha in clarifying this point concerning the difference between precepts and commandments put it this way:

“The evil done by oneself, self-begotten, self-nursed, crushes the foolish, even as a diamond grinds a hard gem.” Irving Babbitt.

*The Dhammapada*, p. 26.

“By oneself is evil done, by oneself one is defiled. Purity and impurity belong to oneself, no one can purify another.” *Loc. cit.*, p. 37.

So it is clear, Buddhist precepts are not commandments because they are based on the principles of causation and the facts of karma. They are not from some omnipotent divinity whose divine will has to be obeyed. For precepts in being governed by the uniform and orderly processes of causation, if transgressed, naturally result in

negative karmic effects and affects sooner or later. In terms of one’s conscience or spirituality, the choices and decisions we make and the things we say and do leave unseen memory traces in our subconscious and unconscious mind that become reality once again when the emergent circumstances and situations arise to trigger similar thoughts, words and actions.

Therefore, paths three through six are actually precepts governed by the uniform and orderly processes of causation as well as by conditionality and interdependency in which one’s thoughts, words and actions are inseparable. Karma especially involves our feelings, desires and intentions tainted by our likes and dislikes as based on our past experiences. Therefore, karma involves our volitions, or the choices and decisions we are constantly making that keep triggering the very things that we say and do. For these reasons, the Eightfold Path is not based on some kind of fear of a supreme omnipotent deity’s wrathful punishments as repeatedly depicted throughout the Bible. (See the cases of Onan in Genesis 38:3-10 and Ananias and wife Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11.)

Consequently, in Shin Buddhism the Four Noble Truths are based on the Dharma’s Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness working in full accord with the orderly and uniform principles of causality, conditionality, interdependency, inseparability, especially manifest as the benevolent karmic workings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas constantly grasping and awakening sentient beings to lead them to Buddhahood. The Dharma’s Truth and Reality, therefore, are also governed by the same rules and processes of causation and karma. In other words, the Dharma as revealed by Sakyamuni Buddha also applies to all living and non-living things, not only to human beings.

Therefore, as I often repeat, for these reasons the Dharma is not the monopoly of any one man, race, ethnicity, creed, culture, ideology, religion, specific geographical site or a given specific point in historical time. For, the Dharma as Absolute Truth and Ultimate Reality is beyond all philosophical and theological speculation. Therefore, the Dharma is inconceivable and immeasurable for it is a Timeless Truth and an Eternal Reality.

To have taken refuge in the Dharma is to have taken refuge in the World of All-pervading

Selflessness and All-embracing Togetherness. It is to have been "awakened" by Amida Buddha's Forty-eight Vows of Compassion consummated cosmic aeons ago for the sake of all sentient beings as the Vow to never forsake or abandon them. For this reason Amida is without favoritisms or discriminations, or condemnations or rejections. For these reasons, Amida's Selfless Light of Wisdom and her Life of All-embracing Compassion keeps grasping all sentient beings without rejections, until the last unsavable one attains Buddhahood.

Now Sakyamuni Buddha has pointed out the karmic fact that:

"If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon." Irving Babbitt. *The Dhammapada* I. p. 3.

And, more importantly, he also pointed out that:

"If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him." *Ibid.*

These words of Sakyamuni show that a person's life can either become "full of suffering" or "full of happiness" depending on what thoughts and motivations one chooses and decides to harbor in one's heart, for then, they become the very things one says and does. Therefore the triad of Wisdom, Morality and Meditation that characterizes the Eightfold Path makes each path seamless and inseparable, one from all the other seven. This is an important point to keep in mind.

This is why, said Shinran, people are living in a world that is a "burning house." It is full of verbal conflicts and physical violence. One needs to avoid violence by upholding and living the Eightfold Path. This is because human beings are driven by blind passions and self vanities that burn and scorch others around them like a searing, consuming fire. This is why Shinran said, "All things are empty and vain, therefore, untrue. So the only thing left for us to do is to trust and take refuge in Amida's Sacred Name for "only the nembutsu is true, real and sincere" (Tannisho, Epilogue. p. 36). What Shinran means by these words is that a person "hopelessly riddled by transgressions and desecrations can be saved only by trusting in the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness by taking refuge in its Reality of Togetherness as constantly being

## WORDS OF SHINRAN

"This being so, it is not necessary to put on any outward form of wisdom or morality or purity, though we are holding within ourselves all manners of falsehood and unreality; only let the Vows of Amida, the original abode (essence), work themselves out. O, be thou ever reverent! Never think that this is slighting the dignity of a god, and there will be no divine wrath visited you yourself." Quoted in Alfred Bloom's "The Story of Heitaro."

manifest as Amida's Benevolence and Beneficence that has never or will ever reject a person, especially the person riddled by evil passions and self vanities.

Let us then briefly review Western history as Eurocentrically depicted since the 15th century up to the 20th century. For it is most important to note that it was when the Europeans, beginning with the Portuguese and Spanish with their Catholic priests, began encountering Hinduism and Buddhism in India that they began mistranslating *dukkha ariya-saccya* as "life is suffering." As of consequence, they concluded that if "life is suffering" then living life would be nothing more than pain and torment, a life full of regrets and misgivings.

Because they mistranslated *dukkha* they also came to the wrong conclusion that what the Buddha taught was nothing more than pessimism, nihilism, fatalism and atheism. Many Catholic priests and scholars in the 1440s up to the 1700s, especially in the 1800s into the early 1900s, as of consequence, continued to misconstrue much of the Buddha's teachings to be that of heathens and idolators.

Therefore, when the Portuguese and Spanish explorers and conquistadors first began discovering the lands of native peoples in the 15th century, they began subjugating and appropriating their lands by displacing and even decimating the native peoples. The Catholic priests who accompanied the explorers were authorized by the Pope to claim the virgin lands they came upon in the name of their One and Only God and country. Thus, their subsequent actions to "convert" native peoples to Christianity were justified by religious sanctions based on selective biblical verses. The priests, as

of consequence, were bent on "converting" the native peoples who were conveniently "profiled" as pagans and heathens who worshipped graven images that were abominations to their God. However, with the coming of the industrial revolution in the 19th century, growing European populations then led to a new phase of North European nations colonizing and expanding their empires in the Americas during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Before Europeans arrived, primitive peoples were living off the "land itself with its flora and fauna." Their implements made of wood, bone, shells and stones were no match against Europeans' swords, muskets, cannons and armored soldiers on horseback. The native peoples being non-literate and naturally sensual were marginalized by a literate and educated people sophisticated in the use of steel implements and guns. Weapons made of sticks, stones and bone were useless against weapons and machines made of steel.

Commodore Matthew Perry opened up Japan to the rest of the world on March 31, 1854. Then, during the Meiji Restoration Era (1868-1912) and Taisho Period (1912-1926), out of economic then political necessity, Japan also became an imperial nation to become embroiled in nation building as the United States and European nations were in the Pacific. The years between 1770 and 1800 up to WWI were times when the world's oceans were primarily under the control and dominance of the Imperial British Navy that was unchallenged as is the United States Navy today in the oceans of the world. The British then had expanded their empire past India as far down to Australia and New Zealand.

India was first colonized by the Portuguese in 1416. Then in 1757 the British defeated the Mughal Dynasty and India came under her control. At the same time, in 1607 English settlers already were occupying and settling Maine well before July 4, 1776. The territory formally had become part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1652 and recognized by royal charter as part of Massachusetts in 1691. In 1820 Maine became a state carved out of what was then Massachusetts. The region formally from "Maine" to the Mississippi was then still under British control until the 13 American colonies declared their independence on July the 4th in 1776. Although China was never colonized, Hong Kong, however, was ceded to the British after the First Opium War (1839-42).

As of consequence, during the Meiji Restoration Era and the Taisho Period, Japan also became an industrialized nation. It is to be noted that the Hawaiian Kingdom was being established between 1795 and 1810, to then be toppled in 1893. During this time, Japan, like the European nations, was vying for pieces of the global pie in Far East Asia. In the process, she became exposed to the influences of European culture, its institutions, traditions, science and technology. Unlike other Asian nations, Japan, however, was able to resist Christianity to retain her Shinto beliefs and ways of imported Buddhism.

Confucianism and Taoism had already been assimilated as part of her national identity, sentiments and sense of loyalty to the emperor. National identity was rooted in the gods of Shintoism. After WWII Japan began recovering to again become embroiled in ways of global capitalism and "multi-national corporations."

An important point concerning the early initial periods of North Europeans exploring and conquering "new-found-lands" and their subsequent subjugation of the native peoples is that these initial navigators were accompanied by Catholic priests bent on "converting" pagans, heathens and idolaters over to Catholicism. The first American Protestant missionary in the 1800s was James Chater. He was sent to Burma in 1807. The appropriation of land and subjugation of people of color was then justified by certain biblical verses. (See Psalms 2:8, 9; Matt. 28:16-20.)

Furthermore, because many present-day fundamentalist Christians continue to misconstrue what the Buddha taught to be nothing more than an "-ism," Shin Buddhism also continues to be "profiled" as an idolatrous faith, a mere "carbon copy" of Protestant Christianity because they see images of Amida as a savior that is nothing more than a graven image. Much of Buddha's teaching, therefore, continues to be misconstrued by Catholic and Protestant missionaries as well as biblical scholars for they see and interpret Buddhist terms and concepts through the twin lens of Judaism and Christianity.

Walpola Rahula has pointed out this error as follows:

"The First Noble Truth ... is generally translated by almost all scholars as 'The

Noble Truth of Suffering,' and it is interpreted to mean that life according to Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain. Both translation and interpretation are highly unsatisfactory and misleading. It is because of this limited, free and easy translation, and its superficial interpretation, that many people have been misled into regarding Buddhism as pessimistic." *What The Buddha Taught*. p. 16.

In entitling his book "*What The Buddha Taught*" Walpola Rahula clearly was pointing out the fact that the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path are not "-isms." Both are teachings that underlie Buddhist principles and doctrines.

Therefore, Shin Buddhists need to give some thought as to why the saying of *Namoh-amida-butsu* serves as a clear mirror on which one's karma riddled self becomes bare and naked for what it actually is, a mere mortal being full of passions and vanities as well as transgressions and desecrations. Such a Right Reflection on one's self on the Dharma Mirror makes it possible for one then to Rightly Contemplate on the Benevolence of Amida who keeps grasping to embrace all sentient beings to never ever forsake or condemn them until the last one of them attains Perfect Peace and Happiness.

In fact, the first two of Amida's Fundamental 48 Vows are the vows to keep descending into the deepest of bottomless hells to retrieve all beings who have fallen therein to bring the last one of them out to the safety of her Pure Land full of freedom and bliss. Vows one and two, therefore, indicate that Amida is not a deity who rejects beings because of their evils to then condemn them to some kind of everlasting fire. For Amida, instead,

*continues on p. 8*

## Donations

*continued from p. 2*

## SHINRAN'S WASAN

Revere Amida Buddha as  
"Majestic Flaming Light,"  
For her Light so clear  
is most pure and bright!  
Her beaming Light disperses  
the very darkness  
Of the Three Realms,\*  
Take refuge, therefore,  
in this Great Being  
as Pure, Clear Light!

Jodo Wasan No. 8

rkt trans.

\*desire, form, formless

keeps entering the most unfathomable of hells to save them all without exceptions!

It was through such an "awakening" that Shinran Shonin came to Rightly Know and Rightly Understand that he himself was such an unsavable one who had been so grasped. As of consequence, he came to acknowledge:

"I am absolutely incapable of any religious practice, hell is my only home." Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. Ch. II. p. 6.

This "realization" made Shinran fully aware that he was incapable of Right Speaking, Doing, Earning of a Livelihood and incapable of steadfast Persevering in pursuing things sacred and spiritual.

For these reasons Shinran Shonin realized:

"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 that very moment we receive the ultimate benefit of being grasped never to be abandoned." *Loc. cit.*, Ch. I. p. 5.

Upon being so "awakened" Shinran declared:

"...in entrusting ourselves to the Primal Vow no other form of good is necessary, for there is no good that surpasses the nembutsu. And evil need not be feared, for there is no evil which can obstruct the working of Amida's Primal Vow." Unno. *loc. cit.* I. p. 5.

Let us then continue to ponder, reflect, contemplate and meditate deeply on the significance of these words of Shinran which, in a sense, is the "voiceless voice" of Amida Buddha "forever calling from deep within our deepest consciousness." Whether you trust and take refuge in it, Shinran says this is your decision to make. Whether you accept or reject it, it's up to you.

## **BUDDHIST STORIES AND PASSAGES**

*Namu-amida-butsu*  
Is like the moon, like the sun;

**Shinshu Kyokai Mission**  
1631 South Beretania St.  
Honolulu, HI 96826  
skm@ShinshuKyokai.org  
www.ShinshuKyokai.org

*Return Service Requested*

NONPROFIT ORG U.S. POSTAGE PAID HONOLULU, HI PERMIT NO. 231
---

It is like the rising sun:  
My mind grows warm,  
So does my body.  
Let me take a rest  
For a while here.  
How delightful this!  
*Namu-amida-butsu!*  
*Namu-amida-butsu!*

Myokonin Saichi

## **QUESTION AND ANSWER KORNER**

QUESTION: What is the Infinite Wisdom?

ANSWER: As a reply, I quote the words of Shinran: "... appearing in the form of light called 'Tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters,' ... dispelling the darkness of ignorance and unobstructed by karmic evil. ... Unhindered means that it is not obstructed by the karmic evil and blind passion of beings. Know, therefore, that Amida Buddha is light, and that light is the form taken by wisdom." SBT-Series. *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*. pp. 43, 44.