



GASSHO

July
2014

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



REINCARNATION AND TRANSMIGRATION

by rev. r. k. tatsuguchi

We are all born with different degrees of sensitivity and alertness because of how our five sense organs differ in registering incoming stimuli according to how they are screened through our preferences, desires, beliefs and especially how our personal intentions and secret agendas determine how we respond to them. Furthermore, we involuntarily react and/or consciously respond to the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and what keeps touching our "bag of skin" covering our entire bodies from the bottom of our soles (not souls) up to the very top of our heads. In these ways, we are much like pupae enclosed in the cocoons woven out of the webs of our self-centered thoughts, words and actions that encapsulate us in our ego cocoons. We, therefore, are quite dismissive of what does not concern or affect us. Thus, we are thoughtless and insensitive about what the feelings and concerns of others are or may be.

Furthermore, we constantly seek for instant sensual gratifications and personal advantage. We, therefore, sidestep what is painful and pursue what is pleasurable. This is how our personal likes and dislikes affect and influence our beliefs and convictions often to an obsessive degree. Especially is this so concerning where our nationality, cultural pride and personal beliefs are involved.

Thus, mankind's history, ever since the advent of Judaism followed by Christianity and subsequent Islam, has resulted in endless conflicts and wars in the Near and Middle East regions. Especially was this true during the Middle Ages. Over the past centuries "wars in the name of justice" continue to be justified through religious verses. As of

MONTH'S THOUGHT



Selfishness is ingenious, and governed by subtle and shaky desire, admits of endless turnings and qualifications, and the deluded worshippers of self vainly imagine that they can gratify every worldly desire, and at the same time possess the Truth. — James Allen.



consequence, ever since 9/11, the whole world now is affected by acts of indiscriminate violence because of religious and ethnic differences.

We, therefore, are now living in times when the possible extinction of mankind weighs heavily on our minds. Today, a nuclear war would involve nuclear bombs a hundred thousand times more powerful than the ones that were detonated over Hiroshima and later on, Nagasaki. Due to man's attempts to subjugate nature, many of today's social scientists agree that the military complex and armaments industry are heading us to such a possible nuclear disaster.

Now, according to Buddhism, at the very moment of our conception, the simultaneous process of living and dying begins. In Buddhism, this process of living and dying at the same time is referred to as "ceaseless births and deaths." As mentioned, until our last final breath of life, "living and dying" and "dying and living" are seamless and inseparable processes. Generally, human beings err in assuming that they are only living each passing moment. They fail to realize that they are dying as

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES for JULY 2014

1st SAT JUL 5

Waianae Members!

If you wish to hold O'Bon services for your deceased family members, call Rev. Tatsuguchi, **949-2801**

1st SUN JUL 6th

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

Bon Dance Set-up

Choba/Concession/etc.
Please come "KOKUA"
8 A.M. to 12 P.M.
Your help is needed!

TUES JUL 8th

Bon Dance Practice

7:30 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.

BON DANCE NIGHTS

FRI- 11th & SAT- 12th

7:00 to 10:30 P.M.

Note: Pre-Bon Dance Services

Temple sanctuary
at 6:30 p.m.

Short Service for all deceased

Stone Memorial
at 6:50 p.m.

In memory for all war dead

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

2nd SUN JUL 13th

Temple Service Cancelled

3rd SUN JUL 20th

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

4th SUN JUL 27th

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

Thank you for your donations! See p. 7

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

REV. SAKAMOTO'S CORNER

The Three Karmic Actions (Sango)

Hello everyone! It's now July and I am enjoying discussing Buddhism with members.

So, I would like to share an experience I had with a member some four years ago when I, a Los Angeles Betsuin minister, was like a busy worker ant going back and forth between temple and gravesites every day. For ministers at Los Angeles Betsuin officiate graveside services every day.

One day, a member came to me with a question. He was devout and regularly attended Sunday services and Dharma study classes. As good friends we often had discussions.

Though he kept coming to listen to the Dharma, he could not see any proof that he was being helped by Buddha. "What should I do?" he asked. Since I had been a minister only for a short while, I was unable to give him a good answer. So I still feel regret for not having provided a good answer. Then after some four years, I thought of one idea.

Many years ago, there was a controversy in Japan. At the end of the 1700s, two groups of Jodo Shinshu scholars argued about faith. On one side were the academic professors in the highest institutions of learning in Kyoto. On the other side were the scholar-priests in remote areas.

These scholars in Kyoto emphasized the importance of having a doctrinal understanding of *Shinjin* (faith) in one's daily life. For them, to be able to explain one's understanding of faith in one's thinking, acting and speaking was most important. They are called "the three karmic actions" (*sango*) or activities of reasoning and explication.

However, the scholar-priests in remote areas emphasized the importance of the Pure Mind of Faith itself as being the living center in a person's daily life.

For they thought the three karmic actions based on one's abilities to understand, explain and prescribe faith were uncomfortably too close to being self-centered (*jiriki*).

This can be seen as a conflict between doctrinal scholars of Kyoto versus resident temple priests. The priests saw faith as being matters of the heart and not the intellect. So which do you think is right?

The Edo Tokugawa government of those times made the decision not to change traditional doctrine. So the scholar priests won the case. But I believe that matters concerning Shinjin (or Faith) yet have deeper meanings.

In Tannisho Chapter IX (*Collected Works of Shinran* by Michio Tokunaga), Yuienso says: "Although I say the nembutsu, the feeling of dancing with joy is faint within me, and I have no thought of wanting to go to the Pure Land quickly. How should it be for a person of nembutsu?" (page 665). Master Shinran then answered, "I, too, have had this question, and the same unrest occurs in you..." When I came upon this passage, I felt relief because everyone feels the same way about going to the Pure Land. Master Shinran, as well, faced the same question!

Then, in a later passage, Shinran says, "It is hard for us to abandon this old house of pain, where we have been transmigrating for innumerable *kalpas* down to the present, and we feel no longing for the Pure Land of peace, where we have yet to be born. Truly, how powerful our blind passions are! But though we feel reluctant to part from this world, at the moment our karmic bonds to this Saha world run out and helplessly we die, we shall go to that land" (page 666). I realized that it is quite difficult for me to claim that I have Shinjin because even Master Shinran could not prove that he had Shinjin, and suffered.

The Nembutsu path (the road to the Pure Land) is a life-long path. I believe we only have to leave everything up to Amida Buddha and accept everything "just as they are." For Amida's compassion embraces everyone, especially the person with no desire to go to the Pure Land quickly. That everything finally ends as they should is because of Amida Buddha's Compassion that is of the Dharma. The Dharma is the law that governs things as they should be as it protects us with mercifulness. The Dharma always embraces us and helps us though we have no proof of it.

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well in each passing moment.

To appreciate the simultaneous significance of life and death, let us ponder the words of a male's voice preceding a female vocalist as follows:

"People are born naked without a thing into this world. Then they laugh, get angry and also cry. They become attached to some thing or person. Then they become anxious about losing what they have come to cherish. Then once again, they become naked and completely without a thing. Then they step into the Great Unknown Beyond to continue their upward spiritual journey." *Haha wo Shinobu*, my translation.

After the female singer finishes singing, the male voice ends with the words:

"Hoping to be born and yet not born. Not expecting to be born and yet already born!"
Ibid.

I believe these words of the male voice help us to understand what the difference is between reincarnation of one's soul as understood in Hinduism and what is the transmigration of one's self as explained in Buddhism.

In Jodoshinshu teachings, one's birth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha has been made possible by Amida Buddha's consummation of his Eighteenth Vow of Unconditional Compassion as follows:

"If ... when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and call my Name even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. ..." Hisao Inagaki. *The Three Pure Land Sutras*. p. 243.

In the words "desire to be born in my land" we clearly see that the person and not some supposed autonomous "soul" or detached "spirit" that is born into the Pure Land. This "being born" in the Pure Land, therefore, is best understood as being like a "drop of rain" falling into the ocean to instantly become its very waters and currents. It is to be noted that in "disappearing," the drop of rain itself is not obliterated or incinerated, but, instead,

instantly "transformed" into the very waters and currents of the greater boundless ocean.

Yuiembo in the Tannisho quotes the words of Shinran Shonin to affirm that trusting and taking refuge in Amida's Name is:

"... the path that leads to birth in the Pure Land. ..."

However, Shinran, upon realizing his mortal limitations, confessed:

"I really do not know whether the nembutsu may be the cause for my birth in the Pure Land, or the act that shall condemn me to hell. ..."

However, he also said,

"... In essence, such is the true entrusting of this foolish one. Now, whether you accept the nembutsu, entrusting yourself to it, or reject it, that is your decision." Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. II. p. 6, 7.

So Yuiembo in clarifying a person's birth in the Pure Land further quoted Shinran as follows:

"Even a good person attains birth in the Pure Land, how much more so the evil person.

"... the person of self power, being conscious of doing good, lacks the thought of entrusting himself completely to Other Power, ...

"But when he turns over self-power and entrusts himself to Other Power, he attains birth in the land of True Fulfillment.

"... the evil person who entrusts himself to Other Power is truly the one who attains birth in the Pure Land. ..." *Loc. cit.* III. p. 8.

Clearly, these words of Shinran Shonin clarify the point that "being born in the Pure Land" is not about an autonomous "soul" or a detached "spirit" being reincarnated. In actuality, it is a "transformative process" in which a person of faith, upon death, enters there. He instantly attains enlightenment and Buddhahood. This, as mentioned, is like a raindrop falling into the ocean to instantly disappear and become one with the very waters of the ocean without itself being obliterated or incinerated.

Let us now look at what is meant by “birth,” “rebirth” or “being reborn” in the Land of Ultimate Purity and Bliss (*Gokuraku* = *Jodo*). These expressions of being born as used by Shinran Shonin clearly are about “transmigration” that involves our constantly ever-changing thoughts, words and actions as governed by the situation and circumstances according to causal and karmic principles. Consequently, a person is not becoming another person as implied by “reincarnation” in which one’s autonomous soul or spirit, upon death, then leaves the dead body to take up residence in another body, then another, after each death, endlessly, depending on one’s accumulated and cumulative karma.

This difference between one’s whole person being transformed by an “awakening of true and real faith” and a supposed independent soul being reincarnated into another body is clearly seen in Shinran’s words as follows:

“The working of blind passion also causes us not to want to go to the Pure Land and makes us uneasy worrying about death when we become even slightly ill. Impossible it seems to leave this old house of agitation where we have wandered aimlessly since the beginning of time, nor can we long for the Pure Land of peace which we have yet to know. This is due to blind passion so truly powerful and overwhelming. But no matter how reluctant we may be, when our life in this world comes to an end, beyond our control, then for the first time we go to the land of Fulfillment. Those who do not want to go immediately are the special concern of true compassion. For this very reason the Vow of true compassion is completely dependable, and our birth in the Pure Land is absolutely certain.” *Loc. cit.* IX pp. 14, 15.

In these words of Shinran we encounter the words “we have wandered aimlessly since the beginning-less of time ...” and the words “birth in the Pure Land is absolutely certain.” These words suggest that “being “born” is not about reincarnation as mentioned above but is about one’s upward spiritual journey in which one’s consciousness is “being constantly transformed” into higher and higher states of “conscience-ness” until one person finally becomes inseparable and seamless with the “golden splendor” of the Dharma’s Light of Selflessness

WORDS OF SHINRAN

... Other Power means that no selfworking is true working. “Selfworking” is the practitioner’s calculating and designing. Tathagata’s Primal Vow surpasses conceptual understanding; it is a design of the wisdom of Buddhas. It is not the design of foolish beings. No one can fathom the wisdom of Buddhas, which supposes conceptual understanding. ... SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 7. pp. 33, 34.

and its Life of Togetherness. Once again, this transformation process can also be understood as a huge iceberg constantly melting by power of sunlight in the boundless ocean of Selflessness and Togetherness as it steadily becomes its very “unfathomable waters and free flowing currents” called “unobstructed freedom.”

Therefore, the words of Shinran Shonin quoted above need to be read and reread until one comes to the realization that “... in this burning house, all things are empty and vain, therefore, untrue.” Only then will the truth be realized that “only the nembutsu can awaken a faith that is true, real, and sincere” (*loc. cit.*, Epilogue. p. 36).

Over the last five or six decades or so, the reading of Rennyo’s Shonin’s *Hakkotsu no Gobunsho* in English has become unpopular and misunderstood as negativism. For people today do not want to face the facts of impermanence and the eventuality of one’s death. For no person wants to face the facts of one’s own eventual demise. Therefore, to mention “the whitish-grey of bones and ashes” as a reminder of one’s own coming death and cremation, most people find to be an unpleasant fact to face squarely.

Therefore, instead of taking to heart Sakyamuni’s dictum that “all things are impermanent,” and that one, without further delay, needs to take the “great matters concerning one’s after life” (*gosho no ichidai-ji*) into consideration is disregarded. People today avoid facing the actuality that they are “living and dying” as well as “dying and living” in each passing moment of their lives. This being so, expressions of condolences and

sympathy at funerals are often superficial and momentary.

For these reasons, today's funeral rites have become one-sided in celebrating preponderantly the pleasant memories of the deceased person. Sakyamuni, therefore, said that a newborn baby is the third messenger of one's oncoming imminent death. Why? Because as soon as a newborn takes his first breath of life he is already "dying and living" at the same time until he takes his last and final breath of life. The other two messengers, of course, are the deathly ill person and the decrepit aged person. They remind us that we are also subject to sickness and are aging until we take our final breath of life!

Therefore, the whole point in reading the *Hakkotsu no Gobusho* concerning "the grave matters of the afterlife" has become an empty formality in today's funeral rites. For today, the final rites for a deceased person has become a one-sided celebration of his life. For today's Sansei and Yonsei Buddhists and their ethnic peers are engrossed in a world of consumerism focused on what are pleasurable, enjoyable and based on the philosophy "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die!"

Being thoroughly Americanized, *Sansei* and *Yonsei* are unable to truly understand what Yuiembo said:

"... the enlightenment that unfolds in the next birth is the essence of the Pure Land teaching of the Other Power; it is the way of true entrusting to be undertaken by those of inferior religious capacity; the dharma in which the discrimination between good and evil is non-existent." *Loc. cit.*, XV. p. 28.

What Yuiembo means by these words is:

"... when we have crossed the painful ocean of birth and death on the vessel of Amida's Vow and have reached the shore of the land of Fulfillment, the dark clouds of blind passions immediately vanish and the moon of enlightenment of dharma as-it-is appears instantaneously. Having become one with Unhindered Light that illuminates the ten quarters, we bring benefits to all beings. This is true enlightenment." *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 29.

The point to note here in these words of Yuiembo

is the significance of "Having become one with Unhindered Light that illuminates the ten quarters," and that, in doing so, we then "bring benefits to all beings."

So upon being born in the Pure Land and becoming a Buddha, one becomes the equal of Amida. This, however, is not the final goal for those aspiring for birth in the Pure Land. For upon being born in the Pure Land, a person then becomes a Buddha of Compassion who then joins in the eternal work of liberating and enlightening sentient beings without exception until the last "unsavable sentient being" is transformed into a Buddha.

Getting to the traditional "heaven" is not only selective in excluding sinners, but also, a "one-way street." Once you get there, that's it, even though there are yet "unsavable" beings who have been left behind. Getting to the Pure Land is quite different. In getting there, as mentioned, you join all the Eternal Ones. In attaining ultimate Buddhahood you then keep returning to the various realms of transmigration to grasp and return with the beings therein, to then "transform" them into Buddhas. The returning to the world of sentient beings and returning with them to the Pure Land makes it a two-way street. Therefore, the "going to" and "returning from" the Pure Land depicts the World of Dharma as being an all-embracing, infinite sphere in which both the Pure Land and the six realms are fully attained. This is like the waters of all rivers returning to the ocean that have become its very waters.

The Pure Land, therefore, is not a heaven above that is distinct and completely cut off from a hell below. So, let us focus on the words of Yuiembo as follows:

"... when true entrusting is settled, Amida grasps us never to abandon, and we no longer transmigrate in the six realms of existence. Thus, we go beyond birth and death forever." *Ibid.*

Going "beyond birth and death forever" is to "no longer transmigrate in the six realms." These words imply that it is only after one has broken out of the ceaseless cycles of endless births and deaths that one comes to fully realize the Timeless Serenity of Pure Selflessness that is the Eternal Bliss that is an All-embracing Togetherness. This means we need to "awaken a faith that is true, real and genuine" if

we are to come together in relationships of selflessness.

This is why Shinran said:

"... when we become free from self-power and attain the enlightenment of the Pure Land, we will save those bound closest to us through transcendental power, no matter how deeply they are immersed in karmic suffering of the six realms of existence and the four modes of birth." *Loc. cit. V. p. 10.*

Therefore, we should be aware of the connotations of "transmigration" that differ from what "reincarnation" denotes. For transmigration is the process of "transformation." The key is to understand how a given state of consciousness is being constantly transformed into either positive or negative thoughts, feelings, words and deeds. Wandering and meandering between the extremes of "heavenly pleasures, joys and delights" and "hellish unbearable pains, torments and misgivings," this is the significance of walking the Noble Eightfold Path as a person of O-nembutsu.

Therefore, the life of O-nembutsu involves the transformation of one's consciousness into one's conscience-ness. It is to be transfigured by the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness through self-reflections based on contemplations of Amida Buddha. This transformative process is not to be confused with the Hindu notion of reincarnation in which it is believed that the consequences of one's past karma (thoughts, sentiments, words and deeds) determines whether one is reborn as a high caste Brahmin or an outcast untouchable, or even an animal, bird, insect and so forth.

Unfortunately over the years, transmigration and reincarnation have become interchangeable terms. Reincarnation literally means "to be born again in the flesh," implying that one's innermost self is some kind of an autonomous soul or spirit which at death keeps taking up residence in another new body at its very conception.

Transmigration, on the other hand, connotes that one's consciousness is being transformed into one's conscience that is on an "upward spiritual

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SHINRAN'S WASAN

Casting aside our anguish
since beginningless past,
And being assured of attaining
Unsurpassable Enlightenment,
To truly express one's gratitude for
Tathagata's transference
of her twofold merit to us,
'Tis quite impossible to do!

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 49
rkt translation.

THANK YOU
for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

journey," steadily heading for that Ultimate State of Selflessness and Togetherness full of Serenity, Peace and Bliss. It is the Pure Land where full enlightenment and Buddhahood are attained, to then become a returning Buddha.

Therefore, let us in this centennial year's O'Bon season especially reflect on why Shinran did not utter the O-nembutsu as some kind of magical prayer asking for some kind of divine dispensation or miraculous intervention on behalf of one's deceased family loved ones.

The reason was because Shinran had undergone an "awakening of faith" in which he came to realize that:

"... all things have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death." *Loc. cit.*, p. 10.

Those words of Shinran, therefore, express what is an "awakening" that is the "realization" that as long as there are others who are not happy and safe, one's self cannot be truly happy and safe. Therefore, the forbearance to work to this end. Such then is the significance of realizing the Jodoshinshu principle "the self-benefitting that simultaneously is the benefitting of all others" (*jiri-rita en'man*).

This was why Shinran said:

"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.*, l. p. 5.

For this Benevolence of Amida, we must truly recite the O-nembutsu in gratitude, humility and especially a penitence brimming over with boundless joy and happiness as a person never to be condemned or abandoned by Amida.

BUDDHIST VERSE OR STORY

There are four truths in this world; first, all living beings rise from ignorance; second, all objects of

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desire are impermanent, uncertain and suffering; third, all existing things are also impermanent, uncertain and suffering; fourth, there is nothing that can be called an "ego," and there is no such thing as "mine" in all the world. BDK booklet: *The Teaching of the Buddha*. p. 54.

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What is the difference between reincarnation and transmigration?

ANSWER: In brief, reincarnation implies an autonomous soul or disembodied spirit taking up residence in another fleshy body, especially in the moment of its conception. Transmigration, on the other hand, implies a person's consciousness and conscience constantly changing according to the emerging situations and resultant conditions — the ultimate change being the transformation of the darkness of one's spiritual ignorance into the very radiance of Wisdom's Pure Light suffused by its All-embracing Compassion.