



# GASSHO

July  
2015

Issue No: 07-15

“Hands together in reverence & gratitude”



## IS O'BON A TIME OF GHOSTS, GHOULS & GOBLINS?

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

O'Bon (お盆) is a time to hold memorial services for deceased loved ones, especially for a deceased father or mother. Now if any father or mother in any generation in one's family's past were not there, one would not have been born as a human being with a conscience.

In the *Ura-bon Gyo (Ullambana Sutra) Maudgalyayana* (J. Mokuren), one of the foremost disciples of Sakyamuni Buddha, asks him how he can save his mother who has been reborn as a “hungry ghost.” For she is unable to quench her thirst and satisfy her hunger. She is suffering the consequences of her karmic transgressions when she was a human being.

*Maudagalyayana's* mother is unable to quench her thirst and satisfy her hunger because whatever beverage or food she takes in hand instantly turns into fiery flames and ashes. Her lips have shriveled down to a pinhole opening. Her neck has narrowed to make it even harder for her to swallow. She is constantly thirsty and hungry.

As of consequence, her stomach is bloated with the noxious gases of dissatisfaction, discontent, hostility and so forth. Such is the state of having been reincarnated in the “three lower realms” of the “six realms of transmigration.” It also includes people who are living like “brute animals” and “fiendish demons.”

The realm of brute animals depicts human beings living no different from carni-

## MONTH'S THOUGHT



Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. — Mahatma Gandhi



vores red in teeth and claw. In order to survive, they keep killing and devouring others. They are often also depicted as horrific “ghouls” or “ogres” feeding on corpses that they have robbed from their graves. Sakyamuni noted that their tongues were also like swords slicing and cutting others to death with lies and falsehoods. Sakyamuni said their deeds included violence and bloodshed. This state of mental, verbal and physical mayhem is especially seen in times of war when peaceful citizens are conscripted and turned into killing machines by the military establishment.

The three lower realms are not ghosts, ghouls or goblins! They are sub-human states that emerge especially when human beings fall into the bottommost realm of the “Six Realms of Transmigration.” The constant pain, torment and suffering endured as a “hellish being” are due to the consequences of one's past karmic transgressions and desecrations. Such hellish states are not punishments being meted out by some vengeful omnipotent deity or malevolent demon. Nor are they the result of spells and curses cast by some witch or sorcerer.

# REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SERVICES FOR JULY 2015

### 1st SUN July 5th

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

*Also*

"Bon Dance set-up"

Choba/Concession/etc.  
Please come KOKUA  
8 A.M. to 12 noon

### **Bon Dance Practice** Tuesday July 7

7:30 to 9:00 P.M.

### **BON DANCE NIGHTS** **Friday & Saturday** July 10-11

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 war memorial and  
Shinran's statue at 6:50 P.M.

## WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

**KARAOKE SINGERS CLUB** Mon 7 – 9 p.m.  
Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

**KARATE CLASSES** Tues & Fri 6 – 8 p.m.  
Int'l Karate League – Walter Nishioka

**KARATE CLASSES** Thurs 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.  
Hawaii Shotokan Karate – Alan Sekiguchi

**FUJINKAI LADIES' FELLOWSHIP GROUP**  
Tues 9 a.m. – noon

*With Deepest Sympathy*

Ms. Florence H. Oshima 90 yrs. May 6, 2015

Mr. Kunito Kunieda 95 yrs. June 1, 2015

### 2nd SUN July 12th

*Temple service cancelled*

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

### 3rd SUN July 19th

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

### 4th SUN July 26th

MONTHLY FAMILY WORSHIP  
9 a.m. Eng. Service

### 2015 Memorial Service Schedule

2014	1 Year	2013	3 Year	2009	7 Year
2003	13 Year	1999	17 Year	1991	25 Year
1983	33 Year	1966	50 Year	1914	100 Year

In Buddhism, such images of fearful deities, demons or ghosts and spirits are imagined and imaginary. They are creations of the mind. They are "illusions" that fill one's mind with misconceptions and the heart with superstitions. Such notions and sentiments are much like the "virtual reality" depicted in video games that mesmerize to take hold and control the mind and heart of an innocent child. This is exactly why it is so important for parents to diligently monitor what their children are seeing, hearing, saying and doing in their most vulnerable years of childhood. This is also true for what they are drinking and eating as well.

For when a child becomes an adult, his conscious mind continues to be subconsciously influenced by what has been "encoded" in his brain and indelibly "tattooed" in his heart as an infant and a child. What has been "encoded" in a child's deepest consciousness during those most impressionable years become the very justifications and excuses for whatever he, as an adult, thinks, feels, desires, says and does. This is why religious zealots believe passionately in their efforts to convert others to be "God's will." Deranged people, on the other hand, claim that "the devil in them made them say and do whatever they said and did."

That such aberrations of the mind, heart and body are not due to some imagined deity or demonic apparition, this was made quite clear by Sakyamuni Buddha as follows:

"All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts: it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel

## WORDS OF SHINRAN

People who aspire for the Pure Land must not behave outwardly as though wise or good; nor should they act as though diligent. The reason is stated for inwardly we possess that which is empty and transitory." Inwardly means "within"; since the mind contains blind passions, it is empty and transitory. Empty means "vain," "not real," and "not sincere." Transitory means "provisional," "not real." ... Hence, know that we are not good men, nor men of wisdom; that we have no diligence, but only indolence, and within, the heart is ever empty, deceptive, vainglorious, and flattering. We do not have a heart that is true and real. ..."  
*SBT-Series. Notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone." pp. 48-50.*

follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon.

"All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him." Irving Babbitt. *The Dhammapada*. No. I. p. 3.

These words of Sakyamuni Buddha are clear and to the point. They confirm the fact that whatever he taught was based on the orderly and uniform principles of causation, conditionality, interdependency, inseparability, and most importantly, on the irreversible consequences of karma.

This is why Sakyamuni Buddha unmistakably made it also very clear that:

"A man pays in himself for the evil he has done and in himself is purified. The good and evil are purified severally. No one purifies another." *Dhammapada* 7. *Praises of Buddha* (1962 ed.) p. 161.

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Shinran Shonin himself was very much aware of these words of Sakyamuni Buddha.

Now, more significantly, Sakyamuni also spoke of the Benevolence of Amida Buddha's Light of Wisdom and Life of Compassion. In being made "aware" of Amida, Shinran came to realize that he, as a finite mortal being, was undeniably riddled by karmic transgressions and desecrations. And this was exactly why he had been grasped never to be abandoned until such time he finally attains full enlightenment and ultimate Buddhahood upon entering the Great Unknown Beyond. Such is the ultimate Vow of Amida Buddha's 48 Vows, especially his 18<sup>th</sup> Vow, which is to awaken and enlighten all sentient beings without exceptions.

In being so "awakened," Shinran Shonin became "settled" and "established" in Amida's benevolent Wisdom and Compassion that had never rejected or abandoned a sentient being. He, therefore, gratefully acknowledged:

"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." Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. Epilogue. p. 35.

These words of Shinran echo the very words of Shan'tao, a Chinese Pure Land Master, who admonished:

"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 to liberations. *Loc. cit.*, pp. 35, 36.

Through these words of Shinran and Master Shan'tao we too can come to know how as beings of karmic transgressions and desecrations we have been and are embraced by the mysterious powers of True Life and Real Life.

Such an awakening by "true and real faith" makes us all the more aware of how the consequences of mankind's collective karma over the endless passing generations have and yet are affecting our lives in the present. This realization in turn "awakens" us to how our present ongoing thoughts, words and deeds will be affecting the lives of those who are to be born in the future.

When the *Ullambana Sutta* is understood through the Universal Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness timelessly embracing both "good and evil persons" without discriminations or favoritisms, the "six realms of transmigration" then become like six rivers of transmigration disappearing into the Dharma Ocean. Upon entry they instantly become its very boundless waters and free flowing currents of unobstructed freedom. Such an awakening brings one the "realization" that "life never dies although we live in the midst of change and death."

This seamless and inseparable relationship between the world of sentient beings and Buddhas can also be likened to a just born baby suckling at his mother's breasts warmly embraced in her right arm of "Wisdom" and her left arm of "Compassion." In this vision of mother and child is found the significance of the phrases: "one and yet two," and "two and yet one." This is also what is meant by a beginningless past that is inseparable from an ever changing present that is constantly becoming the endless future as it keeps becoming the present then the past. They are distinctly past, present and future in terms of historical time and yet one in terms of "timeless cosmic time," they are one and inseparable.

Although Asian Buddhists observe Celebrations of the Dead or All Soul's Day, Shin Buddhists do not observe O'Bon rituals or services in hopes of winning a deity's favors to avoid his wrath, anger or punishments. Amida Buddha is not such a divinity or deity.

The true significance of holding an O'Bon service for a loved one in Shin Buddhism is to

express one's indebtedness not only to one's one and only father and mother, but to all fathers and mothers as well as countless sentient beings, not only human beings. A sentient being born as a human being, however, is born with a conscience. He is imbued with the Buddha's-mind and Buddha's-nature. Buddha-mind is the Light of Clear Selflessness and Buddha-nature the Life of Pure Togetherness. They are seamless and inseparable. To be born as a human is the best opportunity for one to see Amida Buddha and hear his "voiceless voice" of Selflessness and Togetherness from deep within one's conscience.

This is why,

"The essence of Mahayana Buddhism is discarding thoughts of 'ego' or 'self.' When they are, our life becomes one of service to our family, service to others and service to our country." *Ichinyo*. p. 41. See also section on WORDS OF SHINRAN.

Buddhist scholars hold that the *Ullambana Sutta* was translated from the Sanskrit original by Dharmaraksa, a Chinese Buddhist translator of Sanskrit texts into Chinese. However, recent research shows that this *sutta* (or *sutra*) was not composed in India but actually in China in the mid-sixth century. This is most understandable, for Chinese Buddhists were very much influenced by Confucianism with its emphasis on filial piety focused on revering one's elders and deceased ancestors. So the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit text obviously has been very much influenced by Confucian and Taoist sentiments.

As mentioned in previous *GASSHOs*, Reverend Tamai noticed that Americanized *Sansei* and *Yonsei* and their Caucasian ethnic peers generally regard nonliving and inanimate things to be merely things to be utilized and/or consumed. The justification for such privilege, rights and entitlements for human beings to utilize and consume things and life seems to be based on Genesis 1:28-30. Thus, English translations of Buddhist texts and basic terms are subtly influenced by Judeo-Christian meanings and nuances imbedded in words like faith,

## SHINRAN'S WASAN

Lamentable is it that people,  
whether they be of  
the Way or of the world  
Seek for auspicious times  
and for lucky dates,  
And worship celestial gods  
and terrestrial deities,  
Absorbed in divinations  
and superstitions.

Ryukoku Translation Series.  
Shozomatsu Wasan No. 101.  
p. 101.

salvation, savior, sin, saint and so forth.

Furthermore, Americans generally are not aware of how their claims of having the right to pursue "liberty, freedom and happiness" are heavily self-centered, man-centered and therefore anthropocentric. Their pride in Pilgrim-Puritan origins is rooted in Anglo-American heritage. Their lifestyles often exhibit excessiveness and wastefulness as recently demonstrated by Donald Trump in his claims of being rich and his denigrations of immigrants, especially Mexicans. This is why many Anglo-Americans are unaware that they are ethically and morally insensitive to other viewpoints and lifestyles. This is why their democratic assumptions have and continue to affect negatively the lives of others and global ecosystems.

Furthermore, because we live in a judicial society, we do not want to get involved in situations where we can be sued. Then, on the other hand, if others infringe on our rights, we become, as Tamai sensei says, easily upset and even extremely angry. In our courts of justice sits a judge who decides who is the "winner" and who is the "loser." There is no mediation or "Middle Position" in which both sides are equitably reconciled with equanimity. One side wins, the other side loses.

Tamai sensei noted further that if you point out the faults of people, they become so

flustered and unraveled that they cannot sleep at night. Furthermore, such people have no hesitation in speaking out loudly about the faults they see in others. Sakyamuni Buddha, therefore, admonished all to refrain from rumor mongering, idle gossip, especially spreading outright lies and falsehoods about others.

Nowadays, when parents scold their teenaged children in hopes of correcting and improving their thinking, speech and mannerisms, the immediate reaction and response they get is, "It's a free country!" "I have the right to say and do what is right for me." If the adolescent's parents are recent immigrants from an undeveloped, economically disadvantaged country, all the more do their children born as Americans look down on their non-English speaking parent's ways and customs as backward and unsophisticated. So they are quick to take on the ways of a "consummate American consumerist."

Today's young people feel that they have the right to say and do as they please as long as they do not hurt or harm anyone. But the reality, according to Buddha, is otherwise. Many things and life-forms, because of man's insatiability, are being sacrificed in securing the safety and happiness of human beings in their self indulgences.

The underlying problem with human beings is they

"do not do anything if they are not rewarded for it. All they think about is how to have fun." Tamai, *loc. cit.* p 57.

According to Tamai sensei, human beings deluded by illusions of egoism are:

"without self-control, without patience, without perseverance, and are concerned only about their own interests." *Ibid.*

This is why such self-indulgent people become embroiled in conflicts whenever their rights are impinged upon.

Warfare, as of consequence, with its hidden atrocities, is a glaring example of human-kind's constant deceptions, betrayals and inhumanity to each. They are fueled by the "three venoms" of greed, aggression and vanity that have and still poison the minds of all human kind.

According to Shinran Shonin, an "awakening of true and real faith" is entirely the workings and doings of Amida Buddha's Benevolent Wisdom and her Beneficent Compassion. The seeds of Buddha-nature in human beings cannot sprout or grow without the Dharma Sun's Wisdom and its Life giving rays of Compassion.

Shinran Shonin speaks of persons riddled by the "three venoms" who have undergone an awakening of "true and real faith" (*shinjin*) as follows:

"the gods of heaven and earth bow before the practitioner of true entrusting and those of the world of demons and rival paths cannot obstruct his way. The consequences of karmic evil cannot bear fruit, nor does any form of good equal his. Thus, it is called the great path of unobstructed freedom." T. Unno, *loc. cit.*, VII. p 12.

According to Shinran, a person who has trusted and taken refuge in Amida Buddha does not live in fear of some supreme deity's punishments or torments of evil spirits or malevolent demons.

Utterances of *Namoh-amida-butsu* are not prayers to an omnipotent deity for some kind of personal blessing or miracle. Nor are they magical mantras to ward off calamities and misfortunes. According to Albert Einstein it "indeed would be in a poor way if a person had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death" (Albert Einstein, "Religion and Science," *New York Times Magazine*. 9 November 1930).

So, as Shin Buddhists we need to be reminded that Shinran Shonin said:

“The saying of nembutsu is neither a religious practice nor a good act. Since it is practiced without my calculation, it is ‘non-practice.’ Since it is also not a good created by my calculation, it is ‘non-good.’ Since **it is nothing but Other Power**, completely separated from self power, **it is neither a religious practice nor a good act on the part of the practicer.** T. Unno, *loc. cit.*, VIII p. 13. In bold for emphasis.

These words of Shinran should be read and pondered over and over until one comes to truly understand as to why Shinran finally came to utter: “I am absolutely incapable of any religious practice, hell is my only home” (T. Unno, *op. cit.* II. p. 6. See also Epilogue p. 36).

Know therefore that, there is a significant difference between a driver of a vehicle stepping on the gas pedal trying to beat the “red light” from a driver applying the brakes coming to a complete stop when the “yellow-orange light” comes on at an intersection. The former characterizes “self-power, a person thinking only of himself.” The latter, the “Power of Another, a person who is aware of others.”

The difference is also illustrated by a person walking in a “crosswalk” when a policeman is watching and a person who “jaywalks” when a policeman is not watching.

*continued on p. 8*

**SHINSHU KYOKAI MISSION  
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES  
THE FOLLOWING DONATIONS**

Due to limited space due to Postal restrictions, if your donation is not listed in this GASSHO, it will be listed in a following edition. For any inadvertent misspelling of names, please accept our apologies.

## SACRED BUDDHIST PASSAGES

It would be impossible for a son to repay his parents for their gracious kindness, even if he could carry his father on his right shoulder and his mother on his left for one hundred long years....

But if he leads his parents to Buddha and explains the Buddha's teachings to them, and persuades them to give up a wrong course and follow a right one, leading them to give up all greed and enjoy the practice of offering, then he will be more than repaying them. —B.F.K. The Teaching of Buddha. (1966 ed.) p. 217.

The "jaywalker" is thinking only of his convenience and is endangering himself.

Now, commandments are like traffic laws: if disobeyed one is fined. Precepts are based on karma or the choices and decisions one makes. There are consequences which naturally follow that are governed by the orderly and uniform laws of causality, conditionality and interdependency.

The difference between Buddhist precepts and biblical commandments is elaborated by Shinran as follows:

"In the person of nembutsu opens up the great path of unobstructed freedom." *Tannisho*. VII.

What this means is that a person who has

Shinshu Kyokai Bon Dance  
with craft fair  
July 10 & 11

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undergone an "awakening of true and real faith" is no longer subject to superstitions or someone living in fear of imagined celestial or terrestrial deities or spirits believed to be either benevolent or malevolent. In other words, it is as Sakyamuni Buddha said, "a person awake does not see truth in untruth," nor does he "mistake falsehoods for the truth." (See Dhammapada I as quoted above.)

*To be continued*

## QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What is bonno?

ANSWER: Bonno is a compound of two kanji meaning "passions" and "afflictions." Together they connote "mental afflictions" caused by "raging desires." Shinran Shonin explains that bonno "refers to pains which torment the body resulting in afflictions (that) distress the heart and mind" (SBT-Series. *Notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone."* p. 40). Clearly, bonno means physical, mental, emotional and moral anguish.

**THANK YOU**  
*for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!*

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Names

\*Sometimes a donation arrives late.  
The Gotane 2014 in **May 2015 Gassho**  
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