



Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii

# Only By Embracing...

Office of Buddhist Education Newsletter

*Newsletter for Dharma Schools*

January, 2007

Volume III Issue 1

## **Embraced by the Vow: In Deep Listening**

Theme and Slogan for 2007

As we look at the 2007 Theme and Slogan which states, “Embraced by the Vow: In Deep Listening” we are reminded by Webster that Listening is “to hear something with thoughtful attention: give consideration”. We are Embraced by the Vow of the Buddha to hear deeply.

According to Reverend Taitetsu Unno, “The goal of deep hearing, then, is to bring about a fundamental change in one’s life, such that one realizes liberation and freedom in the midst of worldly entanglements, daily responsibilities, and constant agitations. This path is for everyone, especially lay people, in our contemporary world, because the nembutsu path has no requirements except the recognition of an indisputable fact: *The problems in our daily life can be ultimately transmuted into sources of self-knowledge and received wisdom.* With this conviction, we engage in deep hearing that eventually culminates in a settled and secure state....Through hearing (embodying) that the Buddha’s majestic virtue is great and vast, one attains the stage of non-retrogression.” (from Shin Buddhism, Bits of Rubble Turn into Gold by Taitetsu Unno)

As the *myokonin* (person enlightened through the Jodo Shinshu teachings), Saichi of Ohama wrote:

*How fortunate I am!  
I have received an ear.  
A splendid ear that allows me to hear  
My parent’s bell that sounds, “gong...!”  
Urging me to return,  
Return to the Pure Land!*

When we listen deeply to the teachings and engage in deep hearing and reflection, we come to realize the depth of the teachings of Shinran Shonin and the vows that embrace our life. We can not help but say, “Namu Amida Butsu!” May the year 2007 be “Embraced by the Vow: In Deep Listening”.

# THE ATTITUDE OF HEARING

(Author Unknown)

When you attend Sunday services, what kind of feeling and attitude do you have?

One day Shakyamuni Buddha preached at the Geta Grove Monastery: “My disciples, among the many horses, there are horses that have various bad habits, as follows:

- (1) A horse that suddenly tries to run off with the coach when the harness is being removed.
- (2) A horse that jumps and leaps and tries to bite when he is being harnessed to the coach.
- (3) A horse that tires to draw a coach by raising his front legs.
- (4) A horse that has a habit of kicking the wooden side bar of the coach.
- (5) A horse that stands on its hind legs, like a human being, and draws the coach stepping backwards.
- (6) A horse that always walks on the side of the road instead of the middle of the road.
- (7) A horse when drawing a coach suddenly starts to run and doesn't stop until he comes to a muddy spot on the road.
- (8) A horse that stares at his hay and doesn't attempt to eat, but when it's time to draw the coach suddenly starts to eat his fodder.

“As you can see, there are many horses that had bad habits such as these. All of you must pay attention because even among human beings there are people with bad habits, namely:

- (1) A person who covers his ears and hates to listen to a sermon with deep meaning of Buddhism. He is like horse No. 1.
- (2) A person who listens to a sermon but does not understand its true meaning and on the contrary becomes angry and abusive. He is like horse #2.
- (3) A person from the beginning who hates to listen to a preacher and holds opposing views. He is like horse No. 3.
- (4) A person who despises and reviles someone who tries to preach. He is like horse No. 4.
- (5) A person who quickly stands from his seat and leaves when someone gives a sermon. He is like horse No.5.
- (6) A person instead of quietly listening to someone giving a sermon purposely looks askance or begins to whisper to others. He is like horse No. 6.
- (7) A person who hoots and speaks ill of someone who is preaching. On the other hand if he is asked a question, he becomes silent and does not answer. He is like horse No. 7.
- (8) A person who dares not listen to a preacher but instead thinks of other things only and indulges in evil desires. Then at the end of his life, on the brink of going to hell, finally for the first time tries to listen to the Teaching of Buddha. He is like horse No. 8.

“These are the eight kinds of people. On the occasion of listening to the Dharma, it is well to recall this and make a real effort,” thus Buddha admonished his disciples. (from Avadana Sutra).

This indicates that when we listen to the Dharma we must seriously and earnestly listen.

## **New Year's Message by Kathi Takakuwa Chair of the Commission on Buddhist Education**

Over the last few decades there has been much discussion and hand-wringing about the dwindling membership of the temples. Proposed solutions range from increasing the visibility of the temples, to developing an experiential approach to the Dharma, to introducing meditation, to shifting to a “non-sectarian” form of Buddhism.

As we find our way forward, continuing on as we have been or making changes, I would like each of us to first consider this basic question: **Why do our Jodo Shinshu temples exist?**

Bishop Yosemite has often reminded us that our temples are not social clubs or cultural centers; our temples are places to listen to the Dharma. It is the Nembutsu teachings and the realization of our radical interdependence, not the institutions or form, that matter most.

As people who rely upon the Nembutsu and are grateful for the difference the teachings makes in our lives, our task is to create the conditions where as many people as possible can hear the truth of the Dharma and sincerely encounter the Nembutsu. I believe we need to prioritize the transmission of Jodo Shinshu teachings as the primary function of the temples and feel very strongly that Dharma education for both children AND adults, must become the central concern of the Hawai'i Kyodan. “Without Buddhist education,” Bishop Yosemite has said, “we do not need a temple.” It is that simple.

The Commission on Buddhist Education (CBE) is a state body whose task it is to "study, plan, promote and evaluate all phases of educational and propagational activities," from birth to death, in the Hawai'i Kyodan. Each district has selected a minister and lay Commissioner to represent their district on the CBE. The following individuals are volunteer Commissioners serving their districts:

Kaua'i: Rev. Kosho Yagi and Wanda Costa

O'ahu: Rev. Toyokazu Hagio, (lay Commissioner to be named)

Honolulu: Rev. Shindo Nishiyama, Kathi Takakuwa

Maui: Rev. Shinkai Murakami, Wayne Nishida

Hawai'i Island: Rev. Itaru Nozaki, Corliss Yamaki, Miles Okumura

These Commissioners actively participate in the development of educational efforts at the district and temple levels. Specifically, Commissioners' responsibilities include helping research past efforts, facilitating the exchange of ideas and resources, assisting districts in obtaining available Office of Buddhist Education funding, and volunteering their own time and energy to carry out projects. As a body, the CBE meets three times a year--once face-to-face in Honolulu and two times by teleconferences, to discuss district programs and share ideas about how to coordinate educational efforts within our five districts.

Your district Commissioners and I believe that education plays a key role in the stabilization and regeneration of our temples. Please rely on them to enhance and broaden the efforts you are already making to share the Nembutsu teachings.

In closing, I'd like to share the words of one of our Seven Masters, Zendo:

First realizing shinjin yourself and then guide others to shinjin  
is among difficult things yet even more difficult.  
To awaken beings everywhere to Great Compassion  
is truly to respond in gratitude to the Buddha's benevolence.

Dharma education is the process of becoming aware of Amida's constant embrace through our lives together. If we hope to revive our temples by developing meaningful educational programs, each of us needs to become a committed and serious follower of the Buddha. Do we each feel joy and gratitude? Can we explain how our experiences reveal the evidence of Amida's presence in our lives? How can we guide others in the Dharma if we ourselves are not aware of Amida's constant embrace or if we cannot articulate that awareness to others?

Let us take Zendo's words to heart by studying the Dharma, taking time every day to reflect upon our lives, and by relying upon one another—Commissioners, temple members, and ministers, in order to wake up to Amida and to reach out to others by developing educational efforts that are firmly grounded in the Nembutsu teachings.

# REFLECTIONS

By Reverend Bruce Nakamura

REVEREND SEIGEN YAMAOKA WAS THE GUEST SPEAKER AT THE 2006 JUNE MINISTERS' SEMINAR IN HILO, HAWAII. REVEREND BRUCE NAKAMURA SHARES HIS REFLECTIONS AND PERSONAL INSIGHTS AFTER THE SESSION.

SPECIAL NOTE: Reverend Seigen Yamaoka will be the keynote speaker at the 2007 Dharma School Teachers Conference on Kauai.

## Grasped by Great Compassion

Amida's joy abounds, its gracious power moves me to intone "NamoAmidaButsu". Wholly immersed in my spiritual foolishness, though affliction to greed, anger, and delusion do not cease until I die, we are grasped by untiring wisdom-compassion. Namo Amida Butsu is the wondrous blessing directed to truly benefit all beings pervading the ten-quarters. Its shinjin-content is the inconceivable benefit of being embraced without fail.

## Expanding

The weight of self-importance I place in the role of Jodo Shin ministry for the last eighteen years is central to my meaning and purpose. I can't imagine doing anything else. It's likened to not imagining one's life before marriage and having children. This image of self-importance—how we think to make a difference to others—is revealed and exposed by the amazing power of universal light—that is the Tathagata's wisdom-compassion. Our own memories will fade instantly like foam on the waves. But the memory of the Tathagata Primal-Vow is truly dynamic and inexplicable; its purity-light transforms the ocean of suffering into true-benefiting of all beings.

Dr. Rev. Yamaoka's religious education model brings focus to my interaction with those living in a care setting. The role of ministry demands regular visits to hospitals, care facilities, private homes, home-bound referrals, etc. The majority of visitations consist of a cordial exchange between visitor and the person visited. I have found the greatest advantage to all involved when my visit is accompanied by family members who are regularly present. The patients often say, "Sensei, thank you very much for coming. You must be so busy. I'm sorry to impose on you." My consistent response is, "I'm very glad to be here. I'm happy to see you. Thank you for letting me be with you."

I have always been drawn to those in intimate care settings. As I reflect, I am regularly revisited by images of my maternal grandmother and my own mother, with whom I am deeply attached. I can't help feeling that both—the projections of my anxieties toward them, and the closeness we share—are inextricably bound even up to the present. As a child I witnessed the twilight of "babang's final moments," just before she was taken to the hospital where she soon

died. Despite the intimacy of care provided by her only daughter, my mom, my grandmother's only wish before she died was to see her first born(son) for the last time.

## **Self-Reflection Within Great Compassion**

In my young mind, there seemed at that time nothing more grievous than to be set aside, when it should have mattered the most. Now as I think about it babang's desperate plea to see her only son was really okay with my mother.

Probing a deeper level, I've discovered a profound attachment to those who cling precariously to the edge of mortal life. I am struck and moved by the legacy of their words and content, left for the living to ponder.

Now even at the age of fifty, I struggle with the thoughts of my own mother, who, for the past three years, struggles with the forces of dementia which rob her of her short-term memory. With the same stubbornness and pride which were also her mother's I am haunted by their confusion and pain.

## **Beheld by Great Joy**

Upon meditation, that is the grateful power of NamuAmidaButsu, the excerpt which directs the dynamic heart of the Buddha-dharma to me—"the foolish being of the lowest rank of the lowest grade"—is found in the *SUTRA OF CONTEMPLATION ON THE BUDDHA OF IMMEASURABLE LIFE*.

*When the life of such a foolish person is about to end, he meets a virtuous and learned teacher who comforts him in various ways, expounds for him the exquisite teachings, and urges him to be mindful of the Buddha. But this person is too tormented by pain to be mindful of the Buddha.*

*Then the virtuous friend says, "If you cannot be mindful of the Buddha, you should say that you take refuge in the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. And so, with a sincere mind and an uninterrupted voice, this person says, "NamuAmidaButsu" Manifesting ten moments of thought; and because he says the Buddha's Name, with every thought-moment, the evil karma binding him to birth-and-death for eight kotis of kalpas is eliminated.*

*When his life comes to an end, this person sees a sun-like golden lotus appearing in front of him. And in the interval of a single thought-moment, he immediately attains birth in a lotus flower in the World of Utmost Bliss.*

*After a full twelve great kalpas the lotus flower opens. When the flower unfolds, Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta with voices of great compassion expound in detail for this person the true nature of all existence and the way to eliminate evil karma. Upon hearing this, he is filled with joy and, at the moment, he awakens the mind aspiring for enlightenment. These are called the sentient beings in the lowest rank of the lowest grade of birth. This perception of the sentient beings in the lowest grade of birth is called the sixteenth contemplation."*

My adult life has been a continual struggle to understand and reconcile my own psychological and spiritual pain. The sufferings of my own mother and grandmother evoke a profound gratitude to the inconceivable working of the 18<sup>th</sup> universal Vow and redirects me to its primary and most vital concern—me. It reveals at core a deep fear lodged at the base of my life/death since childhood—“How will I die?”

## Moved by Boundless Gratitude

Shinran’s interpretation of the last part of the universal 18<sup>th</sup> Vow possesses the most stringent restriction—the clause of exclusion—yet, he proclaims a compassion so boundless and profound, directing itself to that very person whom it censures—the person who has committed the five grave offenses and slandered the Buddha-dharma—me.

The confirmation of this anxiety is real. I have no personal ability or spiritual intelligence to liberate myself from it, none, whatsoever. As it is, therein an inexplicable power is directing its work to this profound care.

*Beings of profound affliction are likened  
To polluted streams and river, emptying themselves  
Into the ocean-like Vow of Amida’s wisdom – compassion.  
Corpses of affliction and profound evil are naturally  
Transformed into one taste of unsurpassed virtues.  
They are fully and completely—though at first glance,  
Seemingly like rubble—transformed into gold.  
NamoAmida Butsu...*

Though in this moment you yearn from the rest or peace—no loner a burden to the leaving—your greatest responsibility is to look back and care for others—to those left behind. To the living who yearn and require the most special care and attention; you like Amida Buddha direct the power of immeasurable compassion to them.

Until that moment you become Buddha—living, loving, light and life—everyone from your family, friends, and even staff members of this hospital are watching you. They are learning by your example. And whether you know it or not, your living is teaching profoundly by example, those around you.

And finally you have blessed my life by being here for me. You are neither hopeless, nor helpless. Your true work (hataraki) has already begun from now as a Buddha-to-be.

Thank you for letting me be here. Though this time together is short, you have blessed my life with a deeper conviction of our shared responsibility that does not end at death. Though at first, it seemed I was here for you; in reality we are really here for each other. Thank you. Let us say the blessed gratitude: “NamoAmidaButsu, NamoAmidaButsu, Namandabu, Great compassion directs our return to benefit all others again and again. No doubt, we shall meet again.”

Editor’s Note: Thank you, Reverend Nakamura, for sharing your reflection at this time of year when we reflect on our past and look to the future (Embraced by the Vow: In Deep Listening).

## **Aloha, Bev!**

We bid our fond aloha to Bev Takahashi  
Who has faithfully managed the Bookstore  
With dedication and commitment for 17 years  
Keeping open the HHMH Bookstore Door.

We wish her well on her retirement!  
Thank you for the many hours of dedicated service,  
Upholding the bookstore during times of transition!  
We wish you good health and happiness!

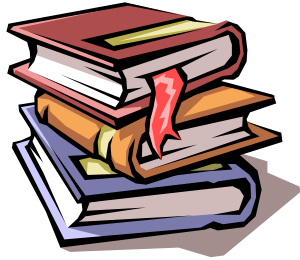
## **A BIT OF HISTORY....**

From A Grateful Past, A Promising Future – The First 100 Years of Honpa Hongwanji in Hawaii,  
Centennial Publication Committee, Ruth M. Tabrah, Joan Fukumoto

Bishop Imamura wrote the following to Hawaii's last Queen. "I had heard that the Queen of Hawaii, Liliuokalani, held good will toward Japan and had some interest in Buddhism. An invitation for her presence was presented through a mediator for the Gotanye Service to be held on May 19, 1901. Unexpectedly she accepted and was accompanied by Mrs. Mary Foster. This being the first instance where the Queen in person had attended a Japanese organization event, the publicity was enormous. Every land throughout the world telegraph noticed the event in large captions. In Japan, articles appeared in newspapers such as *Jiji Shimpo* in Tokyo, *Osaka Asahi*, etc. and the consequence was that Hongwanji found its self-esteem elevated tremendously."

The seven hundred and twenty-ninth anniversary of Shinran Shonin's birth was held at 2:30 p.m. Queen Liliuokalani and a party of other friends were in attendance. Mrs. Mary Foster, the indefatigable Buddhist who had helped raise the funds to build the new temple, sat with her. After the service, Queen Liliuokalani, Mrs. Foster and their party and "a number of American visitors were invited to partake of refreshments with the priests in the reception room of the chapel."

"The account in the *Advertiser* included the complete text of Bishop Imamura's talk on Shinran Shonin. To all who read that, and to those in attendance, two things were now clear. Hongwanji welcomed everyone. Buddhism had become accepted as a vital part of the religious life of Hawaii. No Japanese immigrant need feel 'enryo' about being Buddhist or being seen attending services at Hongwanji. Non-Buddhists could and did also feel drawn to listen to the dharma in the Fort Lane temple."



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