



Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii

Only By Embracing...

Office of Buddhist Education Newsletter
Newsletter for Dharma Schools

November 2006

Volume II Issue 11

DHARMA SCHOOL THEMES FOR DECEMBER:

ENLIGHTENMENT
SERVING OTHERS

Major Service:

BODHI DAY (JODO E) – December 8

Bodhi Day or Jodo E marks the day when Prince Siddhartha “awakened” from a life blinded by ignorance and was “reborn” into an enlightened life as Sakyamuni Buddha.



BODHI DAY

History

At the age of 29, Prince Siddhartha set himself out on a long journey in search of a path that would lead to the end of suffering. An inner urge compelled him to “seek the answer” to life. Some questions he must have pondered: For what purpose has man come into existence? What does he live for? For six (6) years he sought worthy teachers to give him the answer but he failed to find the means to liberate man from the suffering of birth, old age, illness, and death. And he resolved to confront these perplexing problems by himself.

The Prince crossed the River Nairanjana and entered a retreat in a quiet forest near the village of Uruvilva where he began to take up ascetic practices. Despite the religious austerities which made him skin and bone, he still found no light to illuminate his dark mind.

During those days, it was a common belief that man would attain enlightenment and gain peace and liberation by suppressing the desires of the flesh. The Prince, however, came to a realization that desires could not be suppressed as long as man has a physical body. The Prince began to feel that true wisdom is not borne of an emaciated body. Therefore, he drank the milk that was offered by Sujata, the daughter of a landowner in Uruvilva.

After regaining his strength, the prince went on to a place, later known as Buddha-gaya. He sat under a pippala tree (which was named *Bo* or *Bodhi* Tree as the Prince attained the Bodhi under this tree), he made a firm resolution that he would not rise from his seat until he attains enlightenment. He entered into quiet meditation to discern the true nature of himself. In the meantime, Mara, the evil one, appeared and attempted to impede his path to the goal, but the Prince was not perturbed. He continued with Dhyana (meditation) and dispersed the evil one, and finally attained Buddhahood. (Needless to say, Mara was no other than his own illusion. Illusory views prevent one from seeing the true nature of things.) The Prince was 35 years of age. He must have been a solemn sight on the morning of December 8 with the morning star shining above with brilliancy when this epoch-making event took place. BODHI DAY is to commemorate this event.

BODHI DAY THE TEACHING

Awakening to the law of “Dependent Origination” is said to be the content of the religious experience of the Buddha under the Bo Tree. The teaching expounded during the 45-year period, from his 35th year until the time of his demise, was the elaboration of this *Dharma* in all phases of life. Four Noble Truth and the Eightfold Path were the substance of his first sermon which is also called “Setting the Wheel of Dharma in Motion.”

The term “*Bukkyo*” (literally, Buddha Teachings) has two meanings: 1) “the teaching of the Buddha”; 2) “the teaching by which one becomes a Buddha.” The teaching of the Buddha refers to the teaching of the Dharma (truth). The Buddha has awakened to the Dharma which is the Universal Truth; it was not that the Buddha had created the Dharma. The Buddha himself declared, “I merely discovered the old path. Whether I be born in this world or not, the Law of the Truth prevails forevermore.” Dharma rules at any time and any place.

Question is frequently asked: “Then, is not Buddhism very much like science?” Certainly, there are similarities. While science observes the Dharma outside of oneself, Buddhism sees the law within the self. Therefore, a profound self-reflection is necessary in the case of the latter. To look objectively at that which concerns others is science; to see subjectively at that which concerns the self is Buddhism.

Long ago, in China, the poet, Hakurakuten, once asked the great priest, Dorin, “What is the essence of Buddha’s teaching?” Dorin replied tersely:

“Commit no wrong but good deeds do
And let thy heart be pure.
All Buddhas teach this doctrine true
Which will for aye endure.”

Hakurakuten, who was not free from the thought of self-importance and was overly confident of his own knowledge and sagacity, discontentedly retorted, “I need not hear those words from you. It is of such common knowledge that even a child of three would know.” Dorin’s sharp reply was, “There are things that a three year old knows, yet a silver-haired old man is not able to practice. Without practice, it is not even Buddhism.”

Practice is truly difficult. “Do right and purify one’s own heart” is the hardest of all. The study of the outside world as a science is much easier in comparison to tackling the problems of one’s own self....

Now, to realize or to be awakened to the Dharma means to *become a Buddha*. And this is what makes Buddhism unique among the world religions. This is its characteristic as well as its essence. “Buddha” is an Indian word which is translated “Awakened One” or “Enlightened One.” *Bodhi* means Wisdom. And, Bodhi is by nature altruistic.

Wisdom is the eye to see the Truth (Dharma); it is having the power to see all things as they really are (Nyo-jitsu-chi-ken). For instance, we all experience that to lie is difficult but to tell the truth is easy. This is because we tell the truth when we discover our selves.

Thus, to have the eye to see things as they are (Nyo-jitsu-chi-ken) means enlightenment—the attainment of Buddhahood. However, attainment is not the end. The expression, “Buddha is the heart of a parent that cannot remain still” is a good description of Buddhahood. Buddha does not remain in his lofty state for long, but comes to the midst of common ordinary man (Bombu). Buddha’s constant effort is his *Primal Vow* (Hongan). Bombu is “saved” when Buddha’s Wisdom and Compassion reaches him. This union of Buddha and Bombu is *Namu Amida Butsu*. The infinite Wisdom is *Amida Butsu*, and man’s surrender to it is *Namu*.

True, man has wisdom of a sort; but it is finite. It originates in self-centered ego which interprets things colored with egocentricity. It is only when the Bombu is illumined by Buddha’s Light of Wisdom that the ego will be evolved and become one with the Wisdom of the Buddha. This is being *saved*...

Shinran Shonin often spoke of the “Nembutsu of Wisdom” and “Faith of Wisdom.” He said: “*Shinjin* (Faith), rendered into Japanese words, reads *Makoto no Kokoro* (*True Mind*). It does not mean the deluded mind of the Bombu. It is all Buddha Mind. This is Buddha Mind, when given to Bombu, is called *Shinjin* (Faith).” Buddha’s Heart is the Light of Wisdom. When this Light reaches my heart, then I am endowed with Faith and I am awakened to the True Dharma.

In observing the BODHI DAY, let us find joy in our good fortune that we are being delivered, in spite of our unworthiness, by the Nembutsu of Wisdom which was uncovered by Shakyamuni Buddha and expounded by Shinran Shonin. Let us learn to practice *dana* as an expression of gratitude.

From Dharma School Teacher’s Guide

ACTIVITIES FOR DHARMA SCHOOL

INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITIES: This is an opportune time to work together with parents, grandparents, friends, and other seniors in joy and happiness:

1. Plant a Tree: If a Bodhi seedling is available, work with the adult gardeners in your sangha to get advice on planting a tree in December. To celebrate the Enlightenment of the Buddha under the Bodhi Tree, the tree on the temple grounds would signify the growth of the sangha. Plant the tree in a location acceptable to the minister(s) and leaders of the kyodan. Make it a living tree of _____ temple. As a living tree, every year on or near Bodhi Day, place a plaque in front of the tree to signify the members of the sangha. It could be the number of members, the theme or slogan for the year, a saying, etc. with the year somewhere on the plaque. Be creative!



2. Make favors: On a specified Sunday, get together to make a Bodhi Day favor for a nursing home or hospital. Be sure to contact the facility in advance to find out what type of favors are acceptable and when and how to drop off the favors. Partner an adult with a dharma school student to make the favors. A dharma school student could design the favor in advance and have it ready for “putting together” on a designated Sunday. Be creative!
3. Talk Story Session: Pair students with adults for a “Talk Story Sunday”, a day when the students can share their year’s experience and the adults will share their year’s experience or their life as a Jodo Shinshu. It could be a day of talking about how “Jodo Shinshu Has Affected My Life”.
4. A Field Trip Sunday: Take a trip after Sunday morning service to a nearby park to sit under a tree and have an intergenerational conversation. Another alternative is to take a field trip to a park that has a Bodhi Tree. Some of them on Oahu are listed below:
 - a. Foster Botanical Garden, Honolulu – large Bodhi Tree (phone: 522-7065)
 - b. Waipahu Plantation Garden Park, Waipahu (phone: 677-0110)
 - c. Lyons Arboretum, Manoa – Bodhi Tree with a Buddha statue (phone: 988-0456)
 - d. Ho’lomaluhia Botanical Garden, Kaneohe – small Bodhi tree in Kuou Area. (phone: 233-7323)



Sit under the tree or near the tree and talk story about the life of Shakyamuni Buddha. Have a question and answer game. Divide into teams and tally correct answers. Play a charade using words from the “life of Shakyamuni Buddha”. Prepare “Buddha” Bingo cards with dates in the life of Shakyamuni Buddha in each space in advance and play a Bingo game. If a Botanical Garden person is available, ask questions about the Bodhi Tree and its history.

DHARMA SCHOOL CLASS ACTIVITIES:

1. Create a “Bodhi Day” poem or song to share at a temple service. (For a sample, see *Praises of the Buddha* Gatha Book, page 20, “The Bodhi Day”)
2. Write a creative Hawaii version of ‘da life of a seeker’.
3. Make a class Bingo card using the events in the life of Shakyamuni Buddha.
4. Each student is given a piece of paper to write a question about the “Life of Shakyamuni Buddha”. The slips are exchanged with the other students. The student who receives the slip must attempt to answer the question.
5. On a large sheet of paper write the words “ B O D H I D A Y”. Prepare this on one Sunday. The following Sunday (hopefully, on Bodhi Day or on the day with the Bodhi Day Service) bring this large sheet of paper to the temple service before anyone arrives. Place the large sheet on the floor in front of the temple or on a table. As each person arrives for the service, ask him/her to give a word to write under each letter which starts with the letter that signifies Bodhi Day or reminds them of Bodhi Day. (For example: Under “B” might be Buddha, etc.) If a word is given, they get to have a candy or a little snack.
6. Distribute pens or candy to each member at the temple on Bodhi Day with a sticker attached to the item with “N (picture of light) 10 MINT” (Enlightenment) . The receiver will guess what the word/picture signifies.

SAMPLE: N  10 MINT

7. Write a short script on “Bodhi Day” and perform it for the other dharma school students. See the December 8 Bodhi Day article below. Have students make it into a play.
8. Bodhi Leaf: Cut out a Bodhi Leaf on Paper and write a saying or aspiration.



BODHI DAY (DECEMBER 8)

As written in the Dharma Seventh Grade Text, BCA

For six long years Gautama put himself through all kinds of torments. His body was greatly weakened, thin, and tortured. He finally gave up these practices and went his own way in the quest for supreme wisdom.

He bathed in the clear warm waters of the River Nairanjana. He accepted from Sujata, a maiden from the neighboring village, a bowl of rice milk.

The five ascetics who were accompanying Gautama lost faith in him when he abandoned such practices. They said Gautama had “grown luxurious in his ways and given up the struggle.” So they left Gautama.

Gautama then went to meditate under a Bodhi tree. He sat in the “lotus” position. (In this position, the legs are crossed with the soles of the feet turned upward on the opposite thighs; the hands rest on the lap, the left over the right, palms upward and thumbs touching.” The “lotus” position was used because it ensured that the hands and the feet will be kept under control and the mind will not wander. It also supposedly “fills King Mara with fear.”

“Mara”* was a demon who tempted Gautama as he sat under the Bodhi tree. Gautama was said to achieve enlightenment only after he had overcome the demon leader and his army of followers. The whole process is known in Japanese Buddhism as **goma jodo** or “Conquering Mara and attaining Buddhahood.”

Mara first tried to scare Gautama by saying to him, “Emaciated and ashen of complexion, you are on the verge of death. Your chance of survival is one in a thousand. You ought to live, for only when alive it is possible for you to do good deeds...however, your present efforts are vain and futile, for the way to the true Dharma is hard, painful, and inaccessible.”

Gautama was also faced with the **sansho shima** or “three obstacles and four devils.” The four devils are known as Bonnoma, Omma, Shima, and Tenjima. Tonnoma is the Devil of Delusion, Omma is the Devil of Sickness, Shima is the Devil of Death, and Tenjima is the Emperor Devil who represents the failure to comprehend the truth of human life.

But when these evil forces appeared before Gautama, he faced them squarely and did not move an inch. He said to Mara, “Friend of the slothful, Evil One, you have come for your own sake. I have not the least need for merits. I have faith, heroism and wisdom. Why do you ask me to live, I who am so intent?...As the flesh wastes away my mind becomes more tranquil and firm. While I live thus, having attained the last sensation, my mind looks not to lusts...behold the purity of my being! Lusts are your first army, the second is called aversion. Your third army is hunger and thirst, the fourth craving. Your fifth is sloth and indolence, the six cowardice. Your seventh honor and glory falsely obtained the lauding of oneself and condemning of others. This is your army, Evil One. The coward does not overcome it, but he that overcomes it attains happiness. Wearing **munja** grass shall fight. Better to me is death in battle than that I should live defeated. Some ascetics and Brahmans plunged in this battle and vanquished; They know not the way on which the virtuous, the good, go. Seeing the army on all sides I go to meet Mara arrayed with elephants in the battle. He shall not drive me from my post.” In this way, Gautama confronted and struggled with Mara.

Mara finally gave up and withdrew his army saying, “For seven years I followed Gautama step by step. I could find no entrance to the all-enlightened, the watchful one. Just as a crow went after a stone that looked like a lump of fat, mistaking it for a tender morsel,

something sweet and delicious, and finding no sweetness there the crow departed; so like a crow attacking a rock, I leave Gautama in disgust and frustration.”

Gautama’s enlightenment took place on December 8. The Buddha did not go immediately to the people with his teachings. The people only knew him of charms, superstitions, and sacrifices. Most people believed their sufferings were caused by gods who were angry with them. Elaborate ceremonies were held to please the gods.

Compared with these ancient beliefs and customs, the Buddha’s teachings were so different. He found that sacrifices and ceremonies were not necessary. Angry gods did not cause people to suffer. People brought on sufferings by themselves through their own selfish desires and misunderstandings. The Buddha’s way of teaching was to help people to understand and accept life as it is. To desire more and more from life than is possible is bound to cause suffering. The Buddha wanted people to look within themselves for the reasons for their sufferings. He wanted the people to correct themselves.

The Buddha wondered if the people would accept his teachings. Then he realized that his enlightenment is to help a suffering world.

He decided to go first to Benares, which was about 130 miles from Buddh Gaya, where he achieved enlightenment. It must have taken him well over ten days on foot. He went to Benares first when he learned that the five ascetics that he once knew were living there, and he decided that they should be the first ones to hear his teachings.

In a beautiful forest known as the Deer Park, about six miles to the north from the City of Benares, he found the ascetics. When they first saw the Buddha, they said to one another, “Here comes our pleasure-loving friend Gautama, who gave up his austerities in favor of luxury. We must not get up to meet him or to take his alms bowl and robe. But we will offer him a proper seat and he may sit down with us if he wishes.”

But they all changed their minds completely when the Buddha began to speak.

The five ascetics were the Buddha’s first disciples. While the Buddha stayed at the Deer Park, the news about him and his teachings spread swiftly among the people. Many came who were eager to hear of the joy and the ending of human sorrow.

After three months, when there were about sixty disciples, he said, “We have a great duty to perform—let us part company and each take a different way so that no two shall go in the same direction—preach the doctrine to all men and declare the truths which I have made known to you.”

The followers of the Buddha set forth in all directions to help spread the teachings.

Gautama Buddha, himself, left the Deer Park to travel from place to place giving comfort and happiness to all who heard him.

**Mara is that force which wells up within a person who is going toward enlightenment and truth and who is using every effort to attain that goal and which tries to block such attainment. He is not a mysterious supernatural being.*



Dharma Card for November

From Reverend Koju Fujieda

It surely is me
Who recites and hears Namuamidabutsu,
But in fact it's the calling from Amida Buddha
To carry me to enlightenment.

Reverend Shinsui Haraguchi

.....
This is the waka poem cherished by Rev. Shinsui Haraguchi (d.1893), which was actually adapted from the original Chinese verse composed by Rev. Daigon (d. 1856) in Yamaguchi Prefecture. Since Rev. Daigon was accustomed to recite the Nembutsu in a rather loud voice, he was suspected of Shomyo Shoin or the heresy of taking Nembutsu recitation as the true cause of Pureland birth while making light of Shinjin, and his case was reported to the Main Temple in Kyoto. Rev. Haraguchi, who happened to be in charge of the suit, requested Rev. Daigon to come to Kyoto, but he responded by a letter due to his old age. Attached to the letter was his splendid Chinese verse:

Inspired by the immeasurable gratitude to the Buddha's compassion,
Nembutsu recitation irresistibly continues from fresh morn till quiet night;
Although I recite and I hear it, it is nothing but the calling
From the Great Compassion to me.

This verse is based on Shinran Shonin's authentic explication of the Six-Character Name or the Nembutsu, "It is the command of the Primal vow calling to and summoning us" (The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization 11).

How come the Nembutsu we utter is the calling of the Buddha Himself? How gracious!
How close!

NANDA'S LAMP

Story from Dharma School Teacher's Guide

Long ago in India there lived a woman named Nanda who was so poor that she could barely feed herself, but she was kind and carried a deep faith in the Lord Buddha's teachings. In those days it was a custom for the people to practice Dana, everyone offering what he could to the Buddha and his disciples. Nanda, alas, had nothing to offer. One day she found some work and made a few pennies so she too could make an offering. She decided to buy some oil to light a lamp at the temple where the Buddha was staying. When evening came many lights flickered brightly and among them was Nanda's. During the night all the lamps burned out except one. One of the Buddha's disciples tried to blow out the flame that burned on in the sunlight. The Master said, "It is useless; even if you poured the great ocean upon it, this lamp will remain burning. A very poor woman offered this light, sacrificing the food she needed. Her pure heart is contained within it. Do not forget that in charity the thought behind the offering is the most important thing."

THE POISON ARROW

Story from Dharma School Teacher's Guide

In the search for truth, there are a certain number of questions which are immaterial and have no vital relation to Enlightenment.

Suppose a man was pierced by a poisoned arrow, and a surgeon was called to extract the arrow, but the man objected saying, "Wait, before you begin, I want to know who shot the arrow. Was it a man or a woman? Was it a big or small bow that shot the arrow? What was the bowstring made of? Was it fiber or was it gut? Was the arrow made of rattan or of reed? Before you extract the arrow I want to know all these things." Before all this information can be secured, the poison will have time to circulate all through the system, and the man may die.

When the fire of passion is endangering the world, the composition of the universe matters little. In the presence of sorrow, pain, and death one should first search for a way to end them and then devote himself to the practice of that way.

From Dharma School Teacher's Guide

*I intended
Never to grow old,--
But the temple bell sounds!
Jokun*

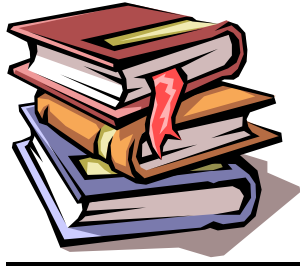
*The departing year;
I hid my grey hairs
From my father.
Etsujin*

*Kicking and spurning,
With not a look behind,
Off goes the year:
Senkaku*

Buddha said, "What good is my enlightenment if I keep it only for myself? My enlightenment is to help a suffering world."

A BIT OF OUR HISTORY...(continued from October issue)

"In the 1890's Honzan felt that their scarce funding for propagation activities had to go to support Shinshu missionaries working in Taiwan, Russia, and Mongolia. Hawaii was a different kind of mission, which they at first considered to be primarily for the large group of Japanese immigrants in the islands. It was therefore to be expected that temples in Hawaii be as self supporting as were Jodoshinshu temples in Japan."



**Honpa Hongwanji
Headquarters Bookstore**

1727 Pali Highway
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Phone # (808) 522-9210

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**Honpa Hongwanji
Mission of Hawaii**

Office of Buddhist Education

1727 Pali Highway
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Phone # (808) 522-9210

Acting Director

Reverend Irene Nakamoto
Office: (808) 522-9212
E-mail: obedir@lava.net
Website: www.obehawaii.com

Children's & Youth Specialist

Ann A. Ishizu
Office: (808) 522-9204
E-mail: honpahi@lava.net