

Hikari the Light



April 2021

Lotus Blooms in the Burning House.... — great master Shan-tao (Zendo), China (613-81)

Spring has come in Alberta

although it is still chilly in the morning and evening. I hope you and your family are all well and doing fine.

We want always to be full of spirit and doing fine. But our life is not easy to live. It does not go as we like. Yet, we want our life as we want. We think our life is our own. Burning our three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness we live every day without any reflection. Greed means we want with our selfish desires more than we need. Anger means we get upset when we are not able to gain what we want. Foolishness means we are not able to see our own future because of our greed and anger. We experience our life's ups and downs, not knowing the cause of this. Since we do not know the cause, we repeat the life of dissatisfaction, complaint, anxiety and loneliness.

In the sutra it points out, "In the midst of worldly desires and attachments, people are born alone and die alone, come alone and go alone. In accordance with their deeds, they go to a place of either pain or pleasure. They themselves receive their consequences and no one can take their place." Our life is indeed not easy place to live.

On the other hand, there is a Buddhist phrase, "lotus in the burning house." Our life, from the eyes of the Buddha, is a burning house of our ignorance. We see all Buddhas, however, are standing or sitting on the lotus. Buddha and lotus are not separated but always one. Amid the burning house of our life, the lotus of compassionate Buddha blooms and becomes one with us, thus liberating us to the Buddha's realm. This is a metaphor.

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We see the statue or picture of Amida Buddha either at temple or family shrine, but sudan. It is beautiful. But the statue or picture itself is not the real Buddha. The real Buddha is eternal working of compassion calling us in *namo amida butsu*. The statue or picture of the Buddha is a visual presentation of Amida's compassion. We are not able to see Amida's working with our eyes. We are not able to see Amida's compassion with our eyes either. Therefore, Amida, the eternal compassion appears in the form of a statue or picture before us. In the sutra it is said that Buddha's form is Buddha's mind. Buddha's mind is great compassion. Actually, we do not bow to the form itself. If we do without knowing the form is temporary, it becomes idol worship. We bow to Buddha's great compassion in appreciation.

So, we are not able to see true Amida Buddha. People these days insist that they only believe things which they can see and touch with their own eyes or hands. These people try to grasp and cling to only what they can see and touch that they consider true and real. Then they suffer because whatever they can see, touch, grasp and cling to are constantly changing and disappearing.

Amida Buddha is not form but this Buddha is working to let us know the true reality of life which never changes. For example, although spring is here in Lethbridge, we are not able to see and touch "Spring." But Spring brings forth flowers to bloom, birds to sing and tiny insects to crawl out from the ground. Spring is its working or energy itself. Similarly, the truth of Amida's compassion is working for us and brings forth a person of entrusting heart, shinjin. I believe that those who humbly bow and appreciate Amida's working and who respond in *namo amida butsu* will be the happiest. Why? It is because when people feel Amida's compassionate working, they find comfort and peace even amidst their sadness, loneliness and suffering.

In gashso,

Yasuo Izumi, Minister
Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta

「安らぎ」

皆様、お元気でしょうか。新型コロナウイルスがそろそろ終わりになるだろうと期待していましたが、異なったウイルスが現れ、亡くなられた方もおられるようです。心よりご同情申し上げます。

「一難去ってまた一難」と言われます。人間の世界に、真の安らぎはないのでしょうか。仏様は、思い通りにならないこの世を娑婆と呼ばれましたが、この言葉は、インドの言葉サーハ(忍土)を語源とします。まことに、耐え、忍ばねばならないことの多い世界であります。

ところで、厳しい冬が終わり、春がやってきました。春は目に見えませんし、つかむことも出来ません。しかし、春は小鳥を呼び、木の芽をよびさします。小さな虫が地面に出てきます。暖かい日差しが雪を溶かしてくれます。春は見えなくとも、大きな力を持っています。この大きな力を「春」と呼ぶのでしょうか。

丁度、春のように、阿弥陀様のお慈悲は見えません。ところが阿弥陀仏の呼び声、ナモアミダブツによって、数限りない方々がこのお慈悲に救われ、勇気づけられてきたのです。そして何よりも死への不安を超える智慧を与えて下さっています。ある念仏者は詠っています。「独り来て、二人で帰る嬉しさは、ナモアミダブツにお共申して。」

合掌 泉康雄

UPDATE from the Board of Directors

The recent board meeting was very productive. Preparations for the upcoming Annual General Meeting took up much of our time. We are hopeful that we will have enough people attend in person or participate via zoom. Other issues that were discussed include:

1. The board of directors has decided to purchase Directors and Operators Insurance. This insurance is to cover the board of directors in case there is legal action against the temple. As board members we could be named in claim against the temple and this added insurance will help protect the board members. Most of the other temples in Canada and many of the non-profit boards already have this coverage.
2. New *Environment, Health and Safety* guidelines were adapted by the board. This was at the recommendation from our former insurance company. Thanks to Bob Muskovich who drafted the policy. All future accidents at the temple will need to be recorded based on a new form we are establishing.
3. The board has decided to have a limited number of in-person attendees at the Hanamatsuri service on April 4th. (2 PM) Despite the growing numbers of COVID cases (in particular in Lethbridge) it was felt that if we follow the health guidelines we could have up to 20 people attend the service. We will also stream the service live on our YouTube channel. We are switching back to the YouTube format as it will be much easier to run along with having people present at the temple.
 - If you would like to attend the service please complete the Signup Genius form online:
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0A45A9A723A2FE3-march>
 - OR phone/text 403-308-3311 to register
 - OR contact Brenda Ikuta at brenda.ikuta63@gmail.com or 403-317-0078 for assistance.
 - The link to our YouTube live channel is:
https://youtu.be/_Wmmu-FIp4o
 - You can also find a banner that links directly to the service on our web page at thebtsa.com
4. The AGM will occur right after the Hanamatsuri service is concluded. Please use the zoom link to attend. Most of the reports are available in the March HIKARI.

Topic: April AGM

Time: Apr 4, 2021 03:00 PM Edmonton

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81990066901?pwd=Q050OWQwRkhYRkM0cnRtM28yK25QZz09>

Meeting ID: 819 9006 6901

Passcode: 46950

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences

Suzue "Sue" Nishimura (91) passed away on March 10, 2021

Temple Wintergarden in Springtime

Early spring in Lethbridge harbours wintery weather and the temple garden bore testament to that on consecutive days in March--the 23rd and 24th.

Cold snowy temperature frosted the apple tree branches on the 23rd, but that changed overnight as spring readings returned the next day, revealing buds on the branches. Compare the photos below to see the typical springtime contrast around *Ohigan* time.

Reminder of the old saying about Lethbridge: "*If you don't like the weather, wait a minute.*"



The snow-covered tree and Buddha on Mar. 23.



On the 24th, a snow-free Buddha and budding limbs.

What is HANAMATSURI?



Shakyamuni and Amida are our father and mother. Full of love and compassion for us; Guiding us through various skillful means. They bring us to awaken the supreme shinjin (awakening of faith). —Shinran (1173-1263)

Hanamatsuri or Flower Festival is held to commemorate the birth of Siddhartha Gautama, a future Shakyamuni Buddha, in Lumbini Garden. Siddhartha, prince of Shakya clan, was born nearly 2600 years ago, 500 years before Jesus. In Jodo Shinshu, Shakyamuni Buddha is considered as the manifestation of Amida, infinite wisdom and boundless compassion. During the service, a flower shrine known as *Hanamido* is set up as a symbol of Lumbini Garden in northern India, present Nepal. People who come to celebrate Buddha's birth pour sweet tea over the image of the baby Buddha.

Rev. Yasuo Izumi Sensei



For Children Only

(1) Once there was a bit of an arrogant bird called a woodpecker. He was living at the top of a huge old tree. The tree was so large that even 10 children linking hands were not able to embrace it. The woodpecker was looking over the forest thinking he was the greatest bird in the forest. What he was doing every day was pecking around his living quarter, day and night. One day, this huge tree fell with a huge sound. Of course, the woodpecker flew before the tree fell down. Flapping his wings, he proudly told all the animals in the forest, "Look, everyone! I am the greatest bird in this whole forest! From now on you must obey me!" What the woodpecker did not know was that on this particular day, from early morning, a strong woodcutter was also cutting at the base of the tree.

Buddha said, "Arrogant and selfish people are not able to see the whole picture."

(2) There was a kind and thoughtful boy. One beautiful day, his neighbor uncle gave him two apples from his garden tree. These apples were so shiny and looked very tasty. Saying thank you to the uncle, he ran to his kitchen and began washing the apples thoroughly.

While he was washing them, his friend visited. "What are you doing?" asked his friend. "My neighbor uncle gave me two apples. So, I am washing them," the boy said. "Wow, they are so shiny and tasty. Can I have one?" asked his friend. "Sure, wait a minute," said the the boy as he bit one apple and then the other. His friend was surprised and thought, "Gee, he is stingy." With a smile, the boy told his friend, "This one is much tastier. Why don't you take this one." The boy gave his friend the sweetest apple.

Buddha said: "Don't judge your friend lightly." (Y. Izumi)



Stop idle talk!

Dharma talk for Ohigan

Roland Ikuta, BTSA ministerial assistant, gave the following Dharma message during the Mar. 21 virtual service on Zoom.



Please join me in Gassho. I will read a wasan or poem from the collected works of Shinran.

When a person awakens shinjin and utters the Name, Amida's light embraces and protects them, and in this life, they acquire immeasurable virtue. This light, boundless and inconceivable, never ceases a moment. Nor does it differentiate by time, or place, or any circumstances.

Today we are observing the *Ohigan* service. It is referred to as the Spring equinox service. It is celebrated in mid-March and is supposed to represent a time when there is a perfect balance in the world. The term *Ohigan* is a translation of the "Other shore" It is meant to be a time when we reflect on our lives and contemplate reaching the other shore or the Pure Land. In Jodo Shinshu, we state that we can get to the other side due to Amida's primal vow's power.

In Jodo Shinshu, another significant meaning of *Ohigan* is a time of balance or equanimity. It is a transition time between winter and summer. The hours of daylight and night are supposed to be equal. The temperatures are not too cold or too hot. During this time of balance, we are supposed to be able to contemplate the teachings of the Buddha. In talking about balance, it brings to mind that Buddhism and particularly the Mahayana path is considered the middle way. The Historical Buddha called the approach he advocated to be the middle path. When he was expounding on this path, he was likely referring to the middle way between a life of excess and that of ascetic practices. As a prince, he experienced a life of extreme wealth and got everything he wanted. As he started his spiritual journey, he turned away from this life of excess and followed an opposite path of extreme asceticism. He would deny himself clothing, food, shelter, or any other comforts. At that time in India, it was felt that following this life of extreme sacrifice could lead one to enlightenment. When he meditated under the Bodhi tree, he found a middle path between these two extremes as the path to enlightenment. He thus taught the 8-fold path as a middle path that could lead to enlightenment. In Mahayana schools, we have modified this teaching to the six paramitas or perfections of the Bodhisattva path. Still, In Jodo Shinshu, we believe that due to our karmic nature, we are unable to obtain enlightenment of our own accord, but Amida Buddha or being one with the ultimate reality brings us to a state of Buddha-hood.

The middle path or trying to establish a balance in our lives is an essential concept for all Buddhists, particularly to Jodo Shinshu followers. I think it is the desire to achieve a balance in our lives that has so many people wanting to follow a more spiritual path. During the COVID pandemic, one of the few positives is that some people have found the ability to establish a better balance in their lives. While there are so many negative parts of this pandemic in terms of the number of people who have caught the virus, the number of deaths we have seen, not being able to be with friends and families, the difficulties of having to be so conscious of washing our hands and wearing masks, etc. there is a new calmness to our lives that may not have been there before.

An example for me is the period just before the pandemic seemed incredibly hectic. We were planning our AGM, hosting the JSBTC (our national organization meetings), hosting the national conference on Human rights and Buddhism in Winnipeg, and having the spring Chow Mein supper event all within three months. It was a crazy schedule! With the start of COVID, all of that went away in one fell swoop. So while the pandemic has been terrible, it has brought a better sense of balance in my life.

When we talk about the importance of balance in our lives, I think there are many people who are on a spiritual path who are trying to achieve this balance. The Jodo Shinshu path is one, which is particularly suited to this balance in one's life. I will explain this in a few minutes but first, let me tell you a story that illustrates the importance of this balance. This is the story of a Mexican fisherman and an American businessman.

An American investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellowfin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them.

The Mexican replied, "Only a little while."

The American then asked why didn't he stay out longer and catch more fish? The Mexican said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs. The American then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?"

The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siestas with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine, and play guitar with my amigos. I have a full and busy life."

The American scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing and, with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats. Eventually, you would have a fleet of fishing boats."

"And then what" asked the fisherman.

"Instead of selling your catch to an intermediary, you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing, and distribution."

"And then what," asked the fisherman.

“You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then LA, and eventually New York City, where you will run your expanding enterprise.”

The Mexican fisherman asked, “But, how long will this all take?”

To which the American replied, “15 – 20 years.”

“But what then?” Asked the Mexican.

The American laughed and said, “That’s the best part. When the time is right, you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You would make millions!”

“Millions – then what?”

The American said, “Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your grandkids, take siestas with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos.”

What a great story. This explains the problem with our busy lives and trying to achieve more and more and do more and more.

So how is it that Jodo Shinshu is a good spiritual practice to lead a life of balance?

We call the Pure Land path the easy path. It is a path of not needing strenuous practices such as meditation or studying the sutras and other Buddhist teachings. It is the path that entrusts the Buddha and the Primal Vow. When we recite the Nembutsu with a sincere and entrusting heart, we are doing so with the understanding that as *bonbu* or imperfect beings, we cannot achieve enlightenment on our own. Still, it is due to our oneness with Amida or the ultimate reality that brings us to enlightenment. It is a path where self-reflection is critical. We need to calmly look at ourselves and our lives regularly. This is one way to promote a better balance in our lives.

In many other sects of Buddhism, there are techniques to bring oneself into a better state of balance. For example, this is why Mindfulness meditation is so popular. *Naikan* reflection can also really help. People are trying to improve their awareness of their current state and trying to restore this balance. As Jodo Shinshu Buddhists, we can use these techniques to improve the balance in our lives. Still, an additional and perhaps more meaningful way is to self-reflect, express our gratitude, and recite the Nembutsu.

Namo Amida Butsu
Roland Ikuta

2021 Membership Form

Full Membership
(\$100 for each member)

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Last Name: _____ First Names(s): _____

Last Name: _____ First Names(s): _____

Home Address: _____

City, Province, Postal Code: _____

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Check to receive The Hikari newsletter by email only.

Please send this form and your remittance to:
Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta Treasurer
470 40th Street South
Lethbridge, AB, T1J 3Z5

*Note

Student membership is limited to persons 18 years or older who are currently registered in a recognized educational institution. It is free of charge with a valid student ID card. Student Members are not entitled to vote at general meetings or to hold office in the BSA and this category does not include membership in the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples of Canada, the national organization.

LET'S EXPAND THE CIRCLE OF THE DHARMA!

Membership
at Mar. 22 – 73

Hoonko Donations

March 2021
Shirley Higa
Kazuko Takaguchi
Total - \$100

Other Donations

March 2021
George & Catherine Fujita
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Dr. Roland & Brenda Ikuta
Sachi Scharf
Glen & Pamela Tanaka
Total - \$1,600

Funeral Donations

Judy Fukushima
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Eichi & Betty Tanaka
Masaye Tanaka
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Total - \$1,680

Total Donations - \$3,615

Please inform us if your name has been omitted or misspelled. Anyone wishing not to be acknowledged in print, please let us know so it will not be published. Thank you.



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FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC - REGISTER FOR ZOOM LINK

**Pacific Time - Check local time zone*

SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 2021 11 AM - 1 PM*

What is the Future of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in the West?

*namo
amida butsu
namo amida butsu*

GUEST SPEAKERS: THREE BISHOPS

HAWAII



REV. ERIC
MATSUMOTO
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BCA



REV. MARVIN
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