



Fellow Travelers

The monthly newsletter of the Longmont Buddhist Temple

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Message from Sensei John Minister's Assistant

Where Do I Choose to Live?

As we celebrate Hana Matsuri, the Flower Festival honoring the birth of Siddhartha Gautama, I want to focus on one element of the story of the birth of the baby who would grow up to be Shakyamuni Buddha. The story is the immediately after he was born, the baby stood up and took seven steps in each direction, North, South, East and West, and proclaimed, *"In heaven above and on earth below, I am the most honored one. I shall dispel the suffering that fills the world."*

The aspect of this story that is the emphasis of this article is the steps specifically why seven? In the cosmology of Buddhism there are six realms of existence in Samsara. They are:

1. God Realm – A blissful, ethereal state in which one is supremely contented, but oblivious to the suffering of others.
2. Jealous God Realm - Fueled by ego and aggression, jealous or warring gods (asuras) are always striving to rise in power and position.
3. Human Realm -Passionate and perceptive, human beings experience many states of mind and have the most opportunity to free themselves from the cycle of death and rebirth (samsara).
4. Animal Realm - A life of ignorant complacency and dullness, in which one doesn't look beyond avoiding pain and seeking comfort.
5. Hungry Ghost Realm - Incalculably frustrated by desires they cannot fulfill, hungry ghosts (pretas) are depicted with big bellies and tiny mouths.
6. Hell Realm - A claustrophobic place of extreme hot or cold in which you can't escape the torment of your own intense anger and hate

Traditionally these were believed to be places. Places where you were re-born depending on your karma in your previous life. In Shin Buddhism they are more

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properly thought of states of mind – psychological realms if you will – that we have the opportunity to inhabit at any given moment.

I think any of us can point to experiences we have that fall into each of these realms. Ever been just a slug?

Spent a period of time blankly complacent? – Animal.

Greedy? – Hungry Ghost.

Angry running on ego and wanting to dominate? – Jealous God.

Depressed and in despair? – Hell.

To a very real extent we have the choice to live in whichever of these realms we choose. If we are compassionate, if we are wise, if we are empathetic, we can be aware of our circumstances. And when we become aware we are in a realm that is other than human, we have the choice to return to the human.

This is not always easy, but we have the choice. I choose to be in the human realm! (Whenever I am aware enough of my mental state...)

Oh, the meaning of that seventh step. The baby Buddha transcended our world of samsara in to nirvana – he was awake.

Namoamidabutsu, John

Temple Updates

by Jackie Tono, Temple Board President

Spring is just around the corner, can you feel it?? It's officially here!!! My sign for spring is Hanamasturi and Easter which is just coming up soon. I saw some daffodils popping up before the snow storm so hopefully they still survived.

In March I was fortunate enough to attend the Buddhist Churches of America annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. There was a lot of information presented to the Temples. The major one is because of the increasing costs and declining membership in BCA they have increased our membership dues to BCA to \$143.06 per person, which in turn has caused LBT to raise our dues to \$390.00 per member. Please remember that when paying our membership dues you can make monthly, quarterly, semi-annual or annual payments. It was nice to see that some of the younger, female ministers are getting promoted to head ministers of Temples and now head ministers of their Districts. Rev. Diana Thompson is now the head minister for Denver Tri-State Buddhist Temple and she is also the head minister for our Mountain State's District. It sounds like Sensei Thompson has some great ideas for our district. Please remember that our Mountain State's District meeting will be hosted by Ogden Buddhist Temple November 8-10, 2019 at the Moab Valley Inn in Moab, Utah.

Longmont Temple held our annual meeting on March 17th. We held elections of our new executive board. Sean Lehman was elected for President for a two year term. Christina Hildebrandt was re-elected as Secretary for a two year term. LaDonna Shea was elected as Financial Secretary for a two year term. Kelli Koga as Vice President and Gail Hogsett as Treasury still have one year left on their terms. LBT has not been able to give Minister Assistant John a pay raise for several years. He has asked if the Temple and our members if they would like to help purchase part of a formal robe (Wakesa) used for our more important services. I am asking our Sangha members if they will be willing to pitch into our piggy bank to help John purchase the Wakesa, the estimated cost is about \$1000.00 with shipping. Everyone please be generous and show your Dana for John for all the hard work he does for our Temple. The executive board has also approved Minister Assistant John to attend 2 MAPP training sessions this year. When John attends his October MAPP training Sensei Thompson will conduct our Sunday service.

During our annual meeting we also passed out updated Longmont Temple Bylaws. If you are a current member please let me know if you need a copy of the updated Bylaws.

We will soon have Square available at our Temple for credit card purchases or payment for membership dues.

Mark your calendar for some of our upcoming events. Sunday, April 7, 2019 Hanamatsuri Service Potluck to follow. Sunday, May 26, 2019 Short Memorial Service at Temple followed by Longmont Cemetery visit. Sunday, June 30, 2019 Temple Annual Clean up early start. Sunday, August 4, 2019 Annual Temple Picnic/Obon at Kanemoto Park.

It has been my honor and pleasure to serve as your president for the last four years. I must thank the board but especially, Nancy Edmonds, John Hughes, Gail Hogsett and Kelli Koga for helping me stay on track, updating the website, sending out the appropriate notices, emails to everyone. Without their help and the help from our Temple members we would not have been able to accomplish everything we've done these last 4 years. Thank you all for supporting us, the board. I know that Sean is more than qualified to take over as president, I'm sure he has many great ideas and his great energy to help make our Temple grow. We are a small but dedicated, generous, welcoming sangha and we are looking forward to supporting and helping our newly elected board. Happily submitting my last article for the Newsletter as president!!

In gassho,
Jackie Tono

Buddha Day (Hanamatsuri)

by Mike Shibata, former Temple Member

BUDDHA DAY (Hanamatsuri)

Hanamatsuri (literally Flower Festival) or Buddha Day is commemorated on April 8th to celebrate the birth of Siddhartha Gautama who was later to become enlightened as Sakyamuni Buddha.

All religions are tinged to some degree by mysticism. The traditional stories of Queen Maya's dream of the white elephant entering her body and events surrounding the birth of Prince Siddhartha certainly fall into the category of mysticism.

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The various rites observed during the Hanamatsuri services are based upon the happenings at the time of Prince Siddhartha's birth. The Hanamido or miniature floral altar of bright flowers provides the setting of the beautiful Lumbini Garden. The statue of the baby Buddha, Tanjo-Butsu, which has his arm extended illustrates the merits of Amida Buddha reaching out to all beings. The pouring of the sweet tea on the statue, Kambutsu, represents the gentle rain which fell that day in Lumbini Garden.

Legend tells us that as Queen Maya was returning to Koli Castle, the home of her parents, to give birth to the child, she stopped to rest in Lumbini Garden. As she reached to pluck the Asoka blossoms, the little baby was born. The King Suddhodana named the child Siddhartha which means "every wish fulfilled." Immediately upon birth, the child rose to his feet and walked seven steps, raised his right hand toward the sky and the left hand downward and proclaimed, "Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am the World Honored One." Then a very gentle and sweet rain fell on the baby and bathed him.

Everybody knows that a newborn baby can't take seven steps right after birth. The legendary story of the birth of the Buddha should not be taken literally. This story is merely used to express and describe the birth of an extraordinary person. What is the significance of the seven steps? This is to show us that the Buddha took a step beyond the six realms of suffering or human bondage and took the extra step to Enlightenment.

We as human beings are treading the paths of the six realms of suffering, but only the Buddha transcended the six realms and took the seventh step to Enlightenment. However, all of us can take this seventh step, because all beings possess Buddha-nature or the seed for Enlightenment. The Buddha did not merely teach us that all men are equal, but that every man, by realizing his highest potentiality, could attain Buddhahood.

It is up to us to decide whether or not we want to explore this potentiality of attaining Buddhahood. Today it appears that not too many people care whether they do or not. Most members feel that what they have learned when they were attending Dharma School was sufficient and have stopped attending church. Religion isn't something that is learned when young and practiced when one is old and ready for the grave. Religion, especially Buddhism, should be practiced every day of our lives in order to be meaningful.

Wheel of Dharma March 2019

Discovering Shinran – the Prolific Poet, Songwriter By Lila Tsuda Grant, Orange County Buddhist Church



The "Winter Pacific Seminar – 21st Century" was held Feb. 9 at the Los Angeles Hampa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple. Participants included, in above left photo, from left, Rev. Sala Sekiya and Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Fujiwara Wondra, and in the above right photo, Rev. Dr. David Matsumoto.

Editor's Note: The "Winter Pacific Seminar – 21st Century" was held Feb. 9 at the Los Angeles Hampa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple. Presented by the Institute of Buddhist Studies and the BCA Center for Buddhist Education, and hosted by the Southern District of the BCA Ministers' Association and Buddhist Education Committee, this year's seminar centered around the theme "Softened Words of Praise – An In-Depth Look at Shinran Shonin's Wasan," and was attended by more than 125 people.

The keynote speakers for the seminar were Rev. Dr. David Matsumoto (English), President of the Institute of Buddhist Studies, and Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Fujiwara Wondra (Japanese), resident minister at the Orange County Buddhist Church. Rev. Sala Sekiya, resident minister of the Gardena Buddhist Church, also presented a chanting workshop as part of the seminar.

Shinran Shonin, founder of Shin Buddhism, was a poet and songwriter? My curiosity and eagerness to learn about Shinran's poems and hymns is what attracted me to attend the recent "Winter Pacific Seminar – 21st Century" with the theme "Softened Words of Praise," promising to be "an in-depth look at Shinran Shonin's Wasan."

I was totally unaware that many of the hundreds of times I have been engrossed in chanting at Buddhist services in unison with the Sangha that the sounds coming from me were actually Japanese 3as an or hymns written by Shinran Shonin in praise or admiration for Amida, the Seven Pure Land Masters, and their doctrine.

Shinran wrote 4as an to confirm his own understanding of Shin Buddhism and to convey his views to laypersons – everyday people like me.

As promised, the keynote session by Rev. Dr. David Matsumoto did take me on an in-depth look at Shinran's Wasan. What a delight to experience Rev. Dr. Matsumoto for the first time. His deep appreciation, knowledge and understanding of Shinran's Wasan was delivered with clarity, reverence, and a touching sense of humor.

I was amazed to learn that Shinran hand wrote more than 300 hymns, all deeply profound, some light-hearted, with the poetic form of four lines and 5–7 cadence. As a sincere student, listening intently to Rev. Dr. Matsumoto, I was able to imagine and hear Amida's name, the sound of Dharma, Pure Land drifting in pentatonic scale, music of purity, flames of retrogression, Shinran's self-reflection and shame, and Buddha's virtue unfolding.

Shinran Shonin was a prolific, scholarly poetsongwriter during the last 15 years of his life, age 75 to almost 90 in 1263. During this time period, when laypersons did not read nor write and only the wealthy and noble were afforded this privilege, Shinran reached everyday individuals with profound, poetic song.

Shinran's hymns and depth of wisdom spread throughout Japan by way of people hearing his words, feeling the rhythm, listening to the music, and joining in repeatedly singing chants.

Shinran, what is my role, my responsibility as a Shin Buddhist, here and now in the 21st Century? Admittedly, I am a foolish-being lacking knowledge and depth, and am completely without poetic and songwriting talent.

Shinran's answer to this question is expressed in his "Last Dharma – Age" theory reminding us of the critical nature of teaching and practice of the Dharma in the next 1,000 and subsequent 10,000 years. Rev. Dr. Matsumoto explained that Shinran is encouraging us to own our role and responsibility to entrust in Amida's Vow, to attain enlightenment through other-power, to recite the Nembutsu.

And then it dawned on me. Similar to and yet different than Shinran in his time, you and I are challenged today in a digital world with the opportunity and responsibility to find a way to spread the depth of the wisdom and teachings to busy everyday people through an accessible, relatable medium.

What if we have an online Shin Buddhist community for all people, where the teachings are accessible from anywhere, anytime, taught by Buddhist ministers, scholars, and authors, and we learn to practice Buddhism in our everyday lives, virtually?

Birth, Death Is Itself Nirvana

By Rev. Gerald Sakamoto, Rinban, San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin



Shinran Shonin writes in the "Shoshinge":

"When foolish beings of delusion and defilement awaken shinjin, They realize that birth-and-death is itself nirvana;

*Without fail they reach the land of immeasurable light
And universally guide sentient beings to enlightenment."*
-- "Collected Works
of Shinran," Page 72

He also writes in the passages on the Pure Land Way:

"Our going and returning, directed to us by Amida, is based on the Primal Vow. When shinjin unfolds in foolish beings possessed of all blind passions, They immediately attain insight into the nonorigination of all existence And come to realize that birth-and-death is itself nirvana."

-- "Collected Works
of Shinran," Page 307

Buddhism begins with a simple question: How do I resolve the difficulties I cause and experience?

Buddhism suggests that the difficulties we experience result from our inability to see things as they are. We see things through our preferences, our likes and dislikes, our prejudices.

We hold on to things we like, push away things we don't like. We divide the world up into what is agreeable and what is disagreeable. We create boundaries that separate causing opportunities for conflict. Buddhism prescribes practices that cultivate the mind that sees things as they are. If we can cultivate a mind that sees things as they are, we can resolve the difficulties we cause and experience. This is the Four Noble Truths as I understand it.

In the two quotes above, Shinran makes, in my mind, a remarkable statement, twice: "birth-and-death is itself nirvana." These are not two sides of the same coin. Nor is birth-and-death like nirvana. Birth-and-death is nirvana.

It's like the experience of natto. There's no going from samsara to nirvana. We often describe going somewhere to get to nirvana. The observance of Ohigan was instituted by Emperor Shomu in eighth century Japan. Ohigan is the Other Shore. The Other Shore represents the resolution of difficulties. To go to the Other Shore we cultivate the Six Paramita. Every year, twice a year, we think about going to the Other Shore. This shore is samsara. The Other Shore is nirvana. There is a separation that needs to be crossed but there is no need to go. Natto is natto. We experience nirvana as samsara because of our preferences, our prejudices.

It is not unusual for two people to experience the same thing in very different ways. Natto is, after all, just fermented beans. For some, it is the distinct smell of an elementary school cafeteria mop, for others it is a taste that is earthy, umami laden, sublime. How I experience natto is the result of many influences.

Hardwired, primitive instincts may be an influence in how I respond to natto: eating things that smell bad could kill you. As unimportant as eating natto may be it can represent our response to other experiences.

When we lived in tribes, we were wary of the stranger. Today, the stranger may be someone of the other political party. We seem to be carrying the same tribal experience that shaped our early response to what was unfamiliar. That unfamiliarity is not knowing.

When we hold on to what is familiar and reject what is unfamiliar, this can result in difficulties. Embracing the unfamiliar can also have difficulties. To see things as they are is not simply embracing everything mindlessly.

To realize samsara is nirvana is to acknowledge the prejudice with which I engage the world.

Musings about Energy Signatures

Christina Hildebrandt, Temple Board Secretary

Two things happened recently that made me wonder about the concept of energy signatures.

Recently, I helped organize a Japanese Tea Ceremony at The Meditation Place in Longmont. The Meditation Place is a wonderful facility, offering many different meditation styles from groups around the city and events and events like this tea ceremony. The ceremony itself

proved to be interesting in many ways: the facilitator Mike Ricci gave us history on Chado (the Way of Tea) and included lots of interesting tidbits, including its evolution over the centuries from a political tool and social event to a spiritual practice. This emphasis on the meditative and spiritual aspect of the tea ceremony, in addition to the methodical, slow and thoughtful movements behind every aspect of the ceremony, created an atmosphere of grounding and quietude in the large space of The Meditation Place. Afterwards, a woman who often attends my singing bowl sessions at TMP approached me. She was positively giddy as she asked me, did you hear that sound? I was confused and didn't know what she was referring to, but she explained: "When Mike was conducting the tea ceremony and everyone's attention was focused so intently on what he was doing, I heard a sound emanating from the room. I can't really put my finger on it... did you hear it?" I thought for a moment and at first responded that I hadn't heard a sound. But then as my mind tuned into that vibration that had been created by the tea ceremony, I said to her, "Oh...oh, you mean like this?", and I proceeded to tone a sound that popped into my mind. Immediately, she said "Yes! yes! that's it!"

The tea ceremony provided an environment of spiritual learning and experience. I believe that whenever we focus our minds, we are creating a vibration with our thoughts and intentions; a sensitive person may even hear that vibration, which is after all a collection of frequencies- sound. The folks at the Heart Math Institute would agree with me, possibly adding that the heart itself has a consciousness that imbues itself into our daily lives and experiences. This idea that our thoughts and "heart-felt" intentions create our experience is not a new one; this concept has been around for thousands of years, especially perhaps in India. The tea ceremony was a special event, but isn't every day of our lives, even every moment of our lives, a special event? Some spiritual traditions that recognize reincarnation say that it is a very rare thing to be reincarnated as a human being; we should be grateful that we have this chance as conscious, thinking beings to create our own reality! We have a choice about our thoughts. And knowing that each thought we have creates an energy signature in our immediate environment leads us to understand how important the quality of our thoughts is. Baird Hersey, author of *The Practice of Nada Yoga: Meditation on the Inner Sacred Sound*, talks about "a soundtrack for your life": he encourages us to watch people as they pass

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through our day, and imagine what music they're emitting; he suggests that we imagine a soundtrack for any activity we're undertaking, and that this will flavor and influence how we act in our lives. Any practice like meditation that helps us observe our own thoughts and thus gives us the opportunity to guide and change them, is an important practice for every day.

In fact, I would suggest that the cultivation of wholesome thoughts through meditation, whether alone in your living room or with a group of people, can change the world into a more just and peaceful place. Think about this: As you add your wholesome thoughts into the world, you change the energy signature of your community and help compose the soundtrack for yourself and your fellow human beings!

April Calendar		
April 7	Hanamatsuri Service	
	Newcomers Welcome	9:30 am - 10:00 am
	Meditation Service	10:00 am - 10:30 am
	Service and Dharma Talk	10:30 am
	Potluck in Community Room	11:30 am - 12:30 pm
April 14	Mindfulness Class with Sensei John Hughes	10:00 am - 11:00 am
April 21	Regular Service	
	Newcomers Welcome	9:30 am - 10:00 am
	Meditation Service	10:00 am - 10:30 am
	Service and Dharma Talk	10:30 am
	Toban (Coffee/Tea Hour) in Community Room	11:30 am – 12:30 pm
April 28	Mindfulness Class with Sensei John Hughes	10:00 am - 11:00 am
	Upcoming Events	
May 26	Memorial Service	
June 30	Clean Up Sunday	
August 4	Obon	
November 8-10	Mountain States conference	

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