

自信教人信

P DHARMA
PRE-SCHOOL
WORKBOOK

Table of Contents

	Page
INTRODUCTION	i
Grade Level Lesson Plans	1
Buddhist Observances	2
Pre-School Activities and Workshop	4
Pre-School Dharma School Parent Guide	42

INTRODUCTION

The student workbook was written to provide meaningful lessons for students and their families, on Buddhism and Jodo-Shinshu, that reflect into daily life. Efforts have been directed toward an integrated, progressive curriculum design to enhance studies at each grade level.

Thanks are due to hundreds of Dharma School teachers and ministers across the United States. The grade level lesson plan book and student workbook are products of the contribution and cooperation of individuals and committee. A special word of gratitude is directed to Bishop Seigen Yamaoka for his constant support of Dharma School projects; to Rev. George Shibata, Chairman of the Ministerial Association's Dharma School Department for his encouragement and assistance; to my special friend and spiritual guide, Rev. Junjo Tsumura who brought me to this project with continued encouragement and advice; to NOBART, Inc., of Chicago (Mr. Noby Yamakoshi, Chairman of the Board) for extraordinary professional services rendered to Dharma School projects, to his staff of Ron Kono (son of the late Rev. G. Kono and Mrs. Grace Kono), Violet Mizuki, and Brian Young; and to the following for materials used in these lessons plans:

Individual Ministers:

Dr. Taitetsu Unno, Rev. Toshio Murakami, Rev. Masami Fujitani, Rev. Ensei Nekoda, Rev. Harold Oda, and the late Rev. Yoshitaka Tamai.

Individual Dharma School Teachers:

Mrs. Jeanette Arakawa, Mr. Yas Aoki, Mrs. Masako Iwase, Mrs. Judy Kono, Mrs. Eiko Masuyama, Mrs. Emi Okano, Mrs. Etsu Osaki, Mrs. Carol Saito, Mrs. Kathy Yoshikawa; and Mr. Isao Tanaka for the photograph.

Organization:

Buddhist Churches of America Ministerial Association Dharma School Committee
Seattle Betsuin Research and Publication Department
Buddhist Churches of America Endowment Foundation
National Federation of Buddhist Women's Association
My Offering program

Thanks, finally, to my husband Calvin who provides copy-editing assistance, and to my children, Satoshi, Keiko and Seiji who patiently support my involvement with Buddhist Churches of America.

With all of this it is hoped that Dharma School students and their families will be encouraged to discover more about Buddhism and Jodo-Shinshu and seek a life of Nembutsu.

In gassho,

Etsuko Steimetz
Materials Coordinator
Buddhist Churches of America
Ministerial Association Dharma School Committee

GRADE LEVEL LESSON PLANS

Aims and objectives of Buddhist Education in the Dharma School:

1. To help students to discover their true selves
2. To help students to realize Amida's Wisdom and Compassion
3. To help students to appreciate and learn about Buddhism and the Jodo Shinshu Sect.
4. To help students to develop character
5. To help students to live and practice the Jodo Shinshu teachings with feeling of gratitude in the Nembutsu.
6. To help students to apply their Buddhist lesson to their daily lives
7. To help students toward decision-making and critical thinking process.
8. To help students to be confident as Buddhist in a Christian Society
9. To help students to work together with family, friends, Temple, and Community.
10. To help students become aware and sensitive of the world and universe in which they live.

III. Grade Level Focus

Pre-School:	Buddhist Etiquette
Kindergarten:	Buddhist Teachings
First Grade:	Thankfulness
Second Grade:	Gratitude
Third Grade:	Our Temple
Fourth Grade:	Study of Gautama Buddha
Fifth Grade:	The Ways of a Buddhist
Sixth Grade:	Buddhist Heritage
Seventh Grade:	Shinran Shonin
Eight Grade:	Nembutsu
High School:	Buddhism/Jodo Shinshu
	Assistant Teachers

JODO SHINSHU CREED

I affirm my faith in Amida's Infinite Wisdom and Compassion. Reciting his Sacred Name, I shall live with strength and joy.

I shall look up to Amida's Guide Light. As I reflect upon my imperfect self, I live with gratitude for His Perfect Compassion which surrounds me at all times.

I shall follow Amida's Teachings. I shall understand the Right Path and resolve to spread the true Teachings.

I rejoice in Amida's Wisdom and Compassion. I shall respect and help my fellow men and work for the good of my community.

Type of Activity	Buddhist Observance	Dates	Titles	Descriptions
Sept.	<i>B.C.A. Founding Day</i>	Sept 1 Sept 23	Higan E	B.C.A. Founding Day Autumnal Equinox
Oct.				
Nov.				Thanksgiving
Dec.	<i>Joya-E Bodhi Day</i>	Dec. 31 Dec. 8	Joya-E Bodhi Day	New Year's Eve Enlightment
Jan.	<i>New Year's Shinran Shonin Memorial</i>	Jan. 1 Jan. 16	New Year Shusho-E Hoonko	New Years
Feb.	<i>Nirvana Day</i>	Feb. 15	Nehan-E	Passing of Sakyamuni into Nirvana
Mar.	<i>Higan</i>	March 21	Higan-E	Spring Equinox
Apr.	<i>Buddha Day</i>	April 8	Hanamaturi	Birth of Gautama Buddha
May	<i>Shinran Shonin Day</i>	May 21	Shuso-Gotan E	Placed his faith in Amida's power Mother's Day
June July	<i>Obon</i>	June July August	Obon	Graduation Obon Festivals Father's Day

BUDDHIST OBSERVANCES

Every day we are surrounded by Amida's light of Wisdom and Compassion. When we become aware of this light, there is no need to designate special days. However, we tend to forget the meaning of Buddhist history and, therefore, the observance of a special religious day sharply focuses our attention on some historic event or an important Buddhist practice and deepens our appreciation of our rich heritage.

January 1 — New Year's Day (Shusho-e)

This is a day of dedication. With renewed resolution we dedicate ourselves to the way of the Nembutsu.

January 16 — Shinran Shonin Memorial Day (Ho-on-ko)

Ho-on-ko is a service in memory of Shinran Shonin (May 21, 1173 - January 16, 1262) the founder of Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land Sect). Shinran Shonin was the first to teach absolute faith in Amida Buddha.

February 15 — Nirvana Day (Nehan-e)

On this day we solemnly observe the passing of Sakyamuni Buddha into Pari-nirvana.

March 21 — Higan (Higan-e)

Higan, meaning Other Shore, is a service conducted in spring on or about equinox day. At this time harmony rules throughout the universe. Therefore, we gather before the shrine of Amida Buddha to devote ourselves to the realization of this harmony in our inner lives.

April 8 — Buddha Day (Hanamatsuri)

This service is held to commemorate the birth of Gautama in Lumbini Garden. During the service a flower shrine known as Hanamido is set up in front of the main shrine as a symbol of Lumbini Garden. The sangha offers flowers and pours sweet tea over the image of the infant Buddha.

May 21 — Shinran Shonin Day (Gotan-e)

Shinran Shonin was born near Kyoto on May 21, 1173. On this day we observe his birth as the founder of Jodo Shinshu.

July — August — Bon

Bon is a Buddhist Memorial Day. It is an occasion for rejoicing in the enlightenment offered by the Buddha. It is often referred to as a “Gathering of Joy.”

September 1 — BCA Founding Day

This day marks the official introduction of Jodo Shinshu into the mainland United States. The Reverend Shuye Sonoda and the Reverend Kakuryo Nishijima arrived in San Francisco on September 1, 1899.

September 23 — Higan (Higan-e)

The sangha gathers twice a year during the spring and autumn to recall the practices of Six Paramita.

December 8 — Bodhi Day (Jodo-e)

Gautama meditated under the Bodhi Tree (Tree of Enlightenment) and became a Buddha, perfect in Wisdom and Compassion.

December 31 — New Year’s Eve (Joya-e)

On New Year’s Eve we meditate on the countless blessings we have received throughout the year and express our gratitude to our parents, our nation, all beings and Amida Buddha.

Chapter IV

BUDDHIST OBSERVANCE AND ACTIVITIES

ACHIEVEMENT RECORD

<i>PHOTOGRAPH</i>							
<i>NAME</i> _____							
					PRIZE #1		
		PRIZE #2					
				PRIZE #3			
							YOU DID IT!

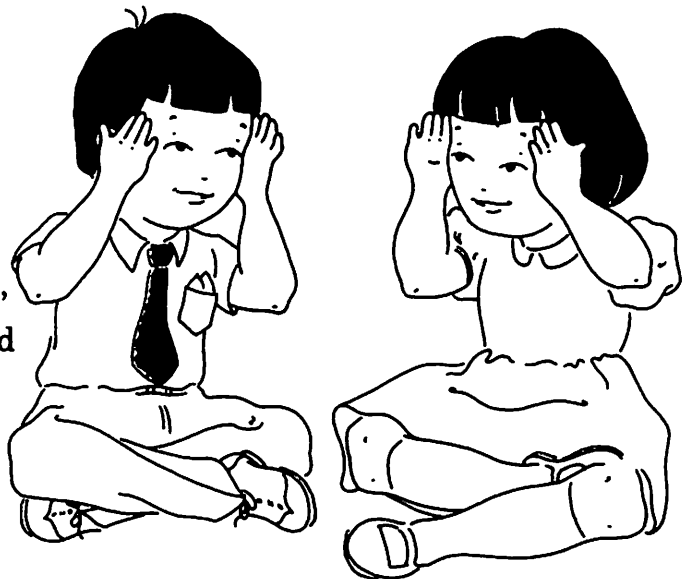
My Helpers

My eyes are two so I can see
Amida watching over me
My ears are open so I can hear
About Amida Buddha dear
My nose can sniff the very nice smell
Of incense burning where Buddha dwells
My mouth can say, "Thank you," too
Namu Amida Butsu
My hands can meet, my head can bend
To Amida Buddha, my special friend
My feet can walk; to the temple take me
Oh, my helpers work so happily.
My eyes, my ears, my nose,
My mouth, my hands, and even my toes!



My Window

This is my window from which to see
Everyone who is a friend to me
The milkman brings the milk we need,
The mailman carries the letters we read
From this window I can see
The boys and girls who play with me
Here comes Sensei to the door.
So many friends — can you think of more?



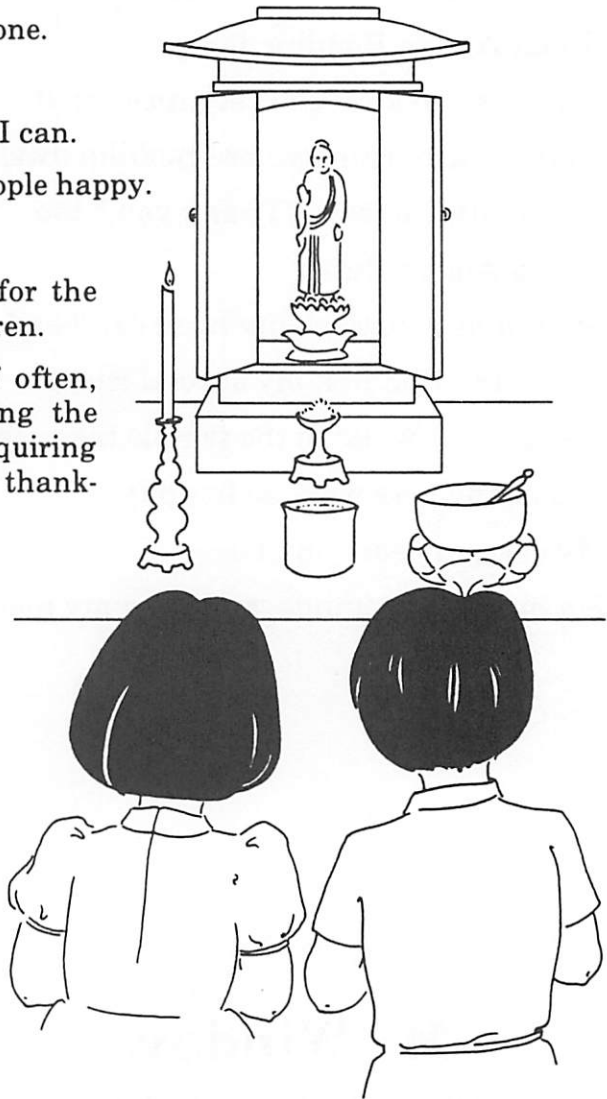
As a Child of Buddha

1. I am thankful for many things.
2. I try to come to Dharma school regularly.
3. I give my offering to the temple.
4. I am friendly to everyone.
5. I try not to be selfish.
6. I try to help wherever I can.
7. I try to make other people happy.
8. I try to be neat.

These points are to serve as reminders for the teacher to think about as she teaches the children.

The teacher should ask herself/himself often, "Through the Dharma school, am I teaching the children to be more friendly? Are the children acquiring neat habits? Are they beginning to feel the joy thankfulness; etc. etc."

We turn towards the Obutsudan
To Buddha
To say thank you for the happy day.



SIX PARAMITA

GIVING—dana:	<i>I shall be helpful to others.</i>
DISCIPLINE—sila:	<i>I shall follow the precepts of the Buddha.</i>
PATIENCE—ksanti:	<i>I shall be patient and understanding.</i>
ENDEAVOR—virya:	<i>I shall do my best in all things.</i>
MEDITATION—dhyana:	<i>I shall reflect on the teachings of the Buddha.</i>
WISDOM—prajna:	<i>I shall seek the light of wisdom.</i>

What Do Our Fingers Do?

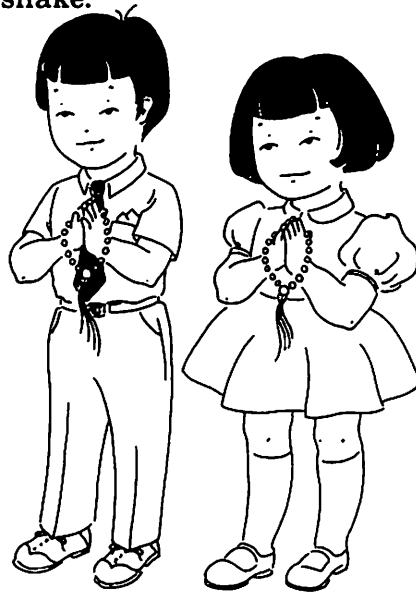
They can wiggle, wiggle, wiggle and shake, shake, shake.
Clap, clap, clap and a wave they can make.
To our mommies they can throw a kiss.

Dial a phone to someone we miss
Count with our fingers from one to ten
Close into balls to start again

Put them in the water to scrub them clean
And give a big splash when we're not seen

And best of all, our fingers can meet
When Amida Buddha we wish to greet

Such busy workers should take their naps
So place them quietly in our laps.



GRATITUDE

1. Explain to the class how important it is to use the words:

May I
Please
Thank you
Excuse me
You're welcome
Namu Amida Butsu

2. Stress the use of the words as the secret to harmony and happiness.

3. Words to remember:

Repeat:

May I
Please
Thank you
Excuse me
You're welcome
Namu Amida Butsu

Manners

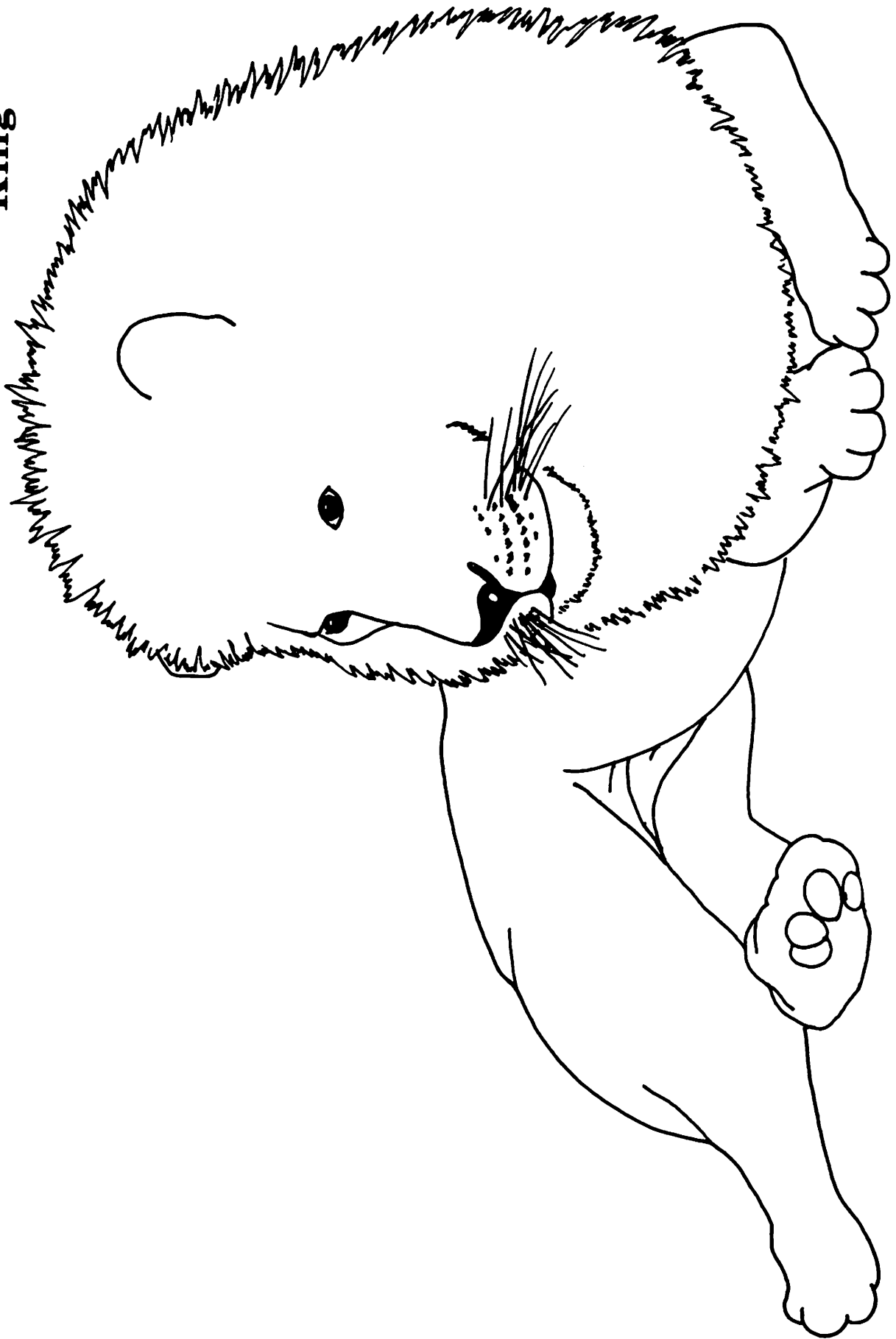
Did you put on your manners when you got dressed today?
Did you remember to put in your heads the magic words we say?
When a friend gives you a present or does something nice for you,
Thank you very much are the words that nicely do.
When there is something that we want, *please* is the magic word
And don't forget *excuse me* when we wish to be heard.
And at dinner, we should say, *Itadakimasu*.
And *Gochisosama* when we have had enough.
We shake the hands of grown up friends and quietly we sit
And try to learn our manners little bit by little bit.

Ojuzu

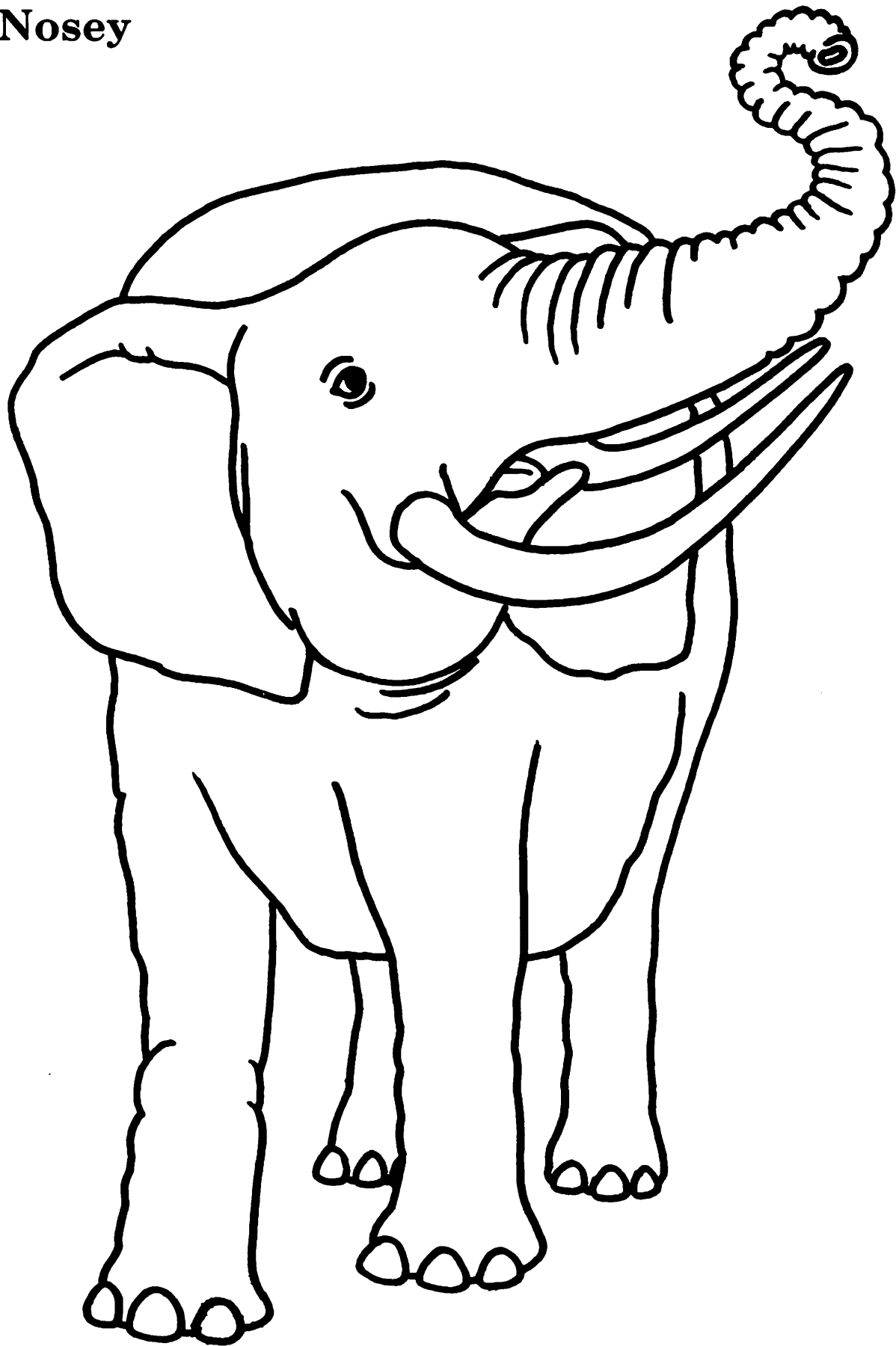
I have a special friend
Who doesn't leave when day does end
It's small enough to go with me
Wherever I go, it comforts me
It doesn't scold or cry
and here's the reason why — —
IT'S MY OJUZU!



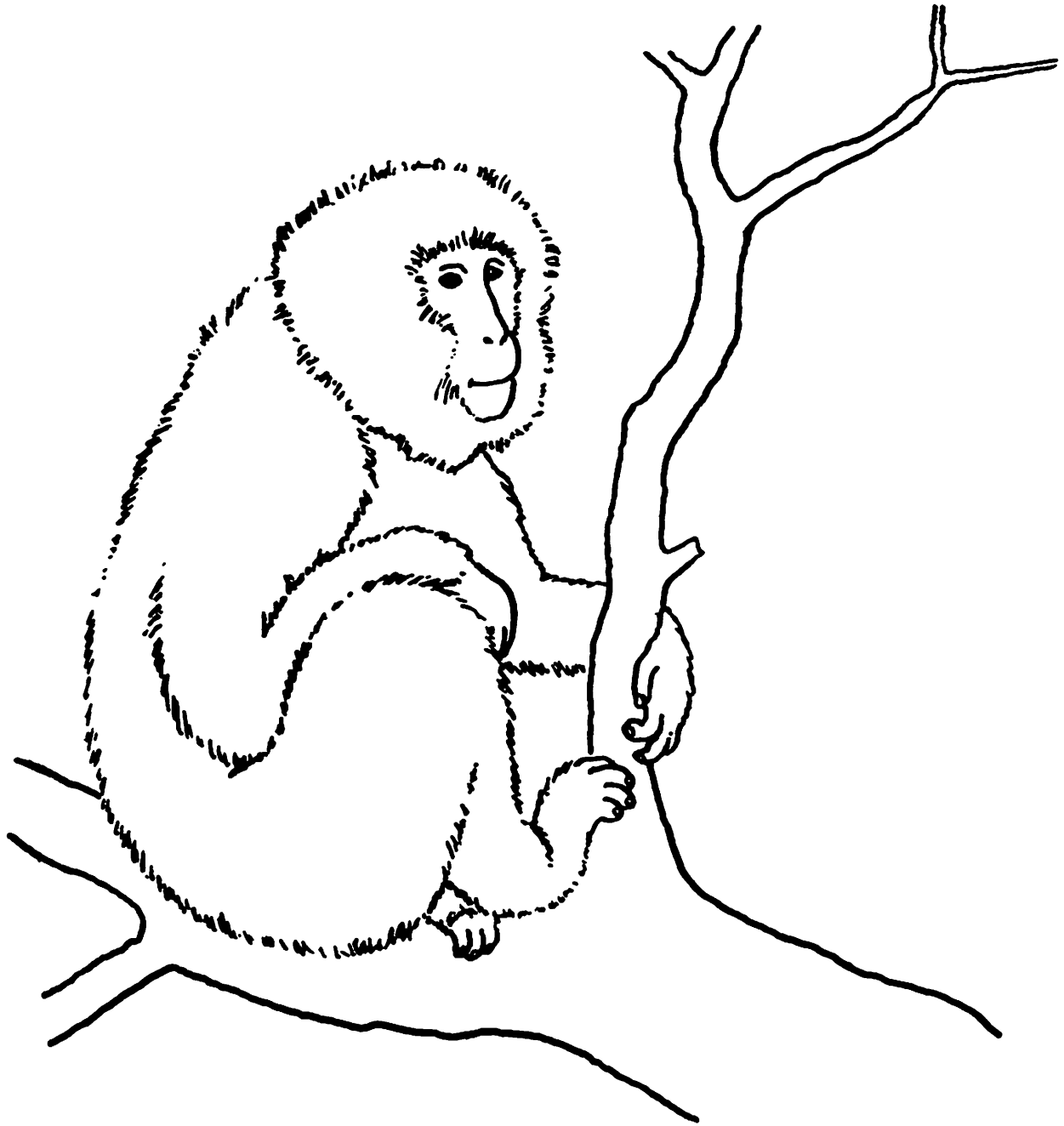
King



Nosey



Jojo



Me

Rabbits have two long ears
And mine are tiny ones.
Kittens have nice whiskers
And on my face there are none.
Birds have pretty feathers;
But I can't fly, can you?
My stomach doesn't have a pouch
As does the kangaroo.

A penguin on ice can waddle
But all I do is walk.
A lion can let out a Roarr!
But all I do is talk.
Puppies use their noses to sniff
And mine sits on my face.
Monkeys use their tails to move
And I stay in one place.

Elephants use trunks to get food,
Not like my fork and knife.
I only swim in summertime;
A fish swims all his life.
Still I'd rather just be me
With Mommy and Daddy near
Than all the animals with their tricks.
I'm happy that I'm here.



Grouchy Me

Sometimes we feel grouchy and we grump, grump, grump around
We want to kick a toy or two and walk with a big frown.
But when we think of what our friend, Amida Buddha said
Think kind and pure and beautiful thoughts,
which means be nice instead.
Then the frowns to smiles turn so all around may see
That we remember the best we can be is to
think of others and not of me.



ANGER

Some people are like letters carved in a rock; they easily give way to anger and retain their angry thoughts for a long time. Some people are like letters written in sand; they give way to anger also, but the angry thoughts quickly pass away. Some people are like letters written in running water; they do not retain their passing thoughts, they let abuse and uncomfortable gossip pass by unnoticed, their minds are always pure and undisturbed.

GREED, ANGER, FOOLISHNESS

These three — greed, anger and foolishness — are called the fires of the world. The fire of greed consumes those who have lost their true minds through greed; the fire of anger consumes those who have lost their true minds through anger; the fire of foolishness consumes those who have lost their true minds through their failure to hear and to heed the teachings of Buddha. Indeed, this world is burning up by its many and various fires. There are fires of greed, fires of anger, fires of foolishness, fires of misunderstanding, fires of infatuation and egoism, fires of decrepitude, sickness and death, fires of sorrow, lamentation, suffering and agony. Everywhere these fires are raging. These fires of worldly passion not only burn the self, they cause others to suffer and they lead others into wrong acts of body, lips and mind. From the wounds that are caused by these fires there issues a pus that infects and poisons everyone it touches and leads them into evil paths.

HAPPY ME



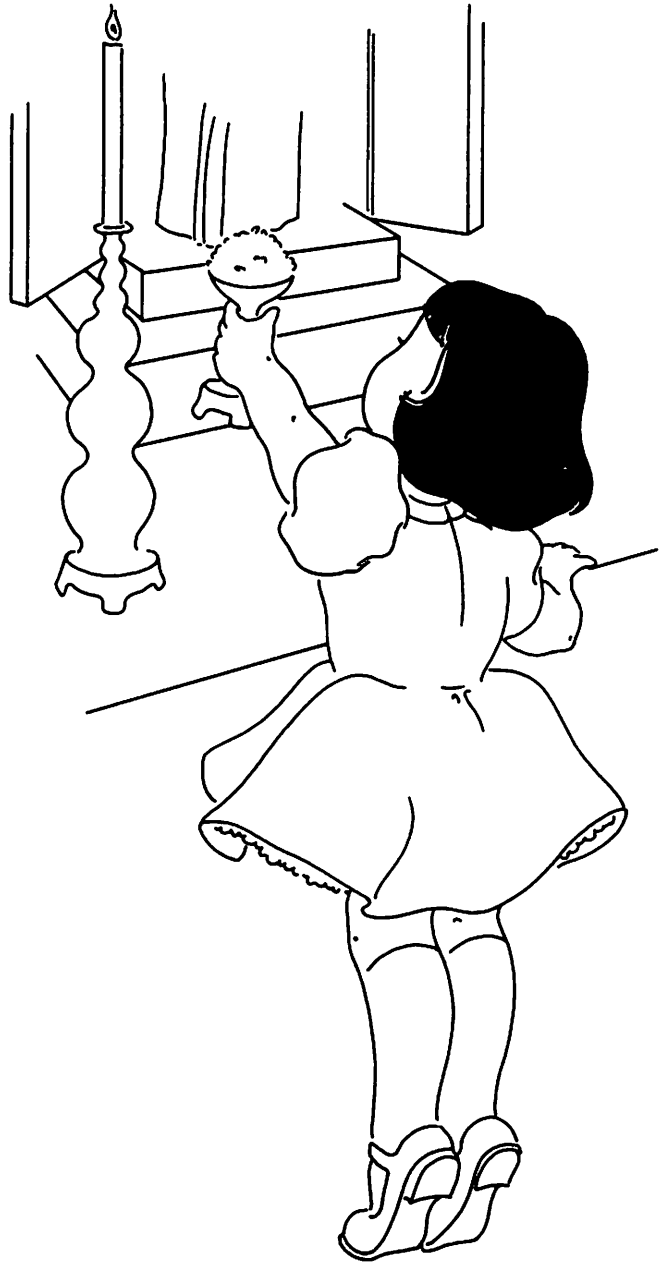
HAPPINESS

The Sangha member will enjoy his/her happiness by habits of recollection and reflection and thanksgiving. He/she will come to realize that his/her faith is Buddha's compassion itself and that it has been given to him/her by Buddha.

"My disciples. The teachings that I have given you are never to be forgotten nor abandoned. They are to be treasured, they are to be thought about, they are to be practiced. If you follow these teachings you will always be happy."

Helpful ME

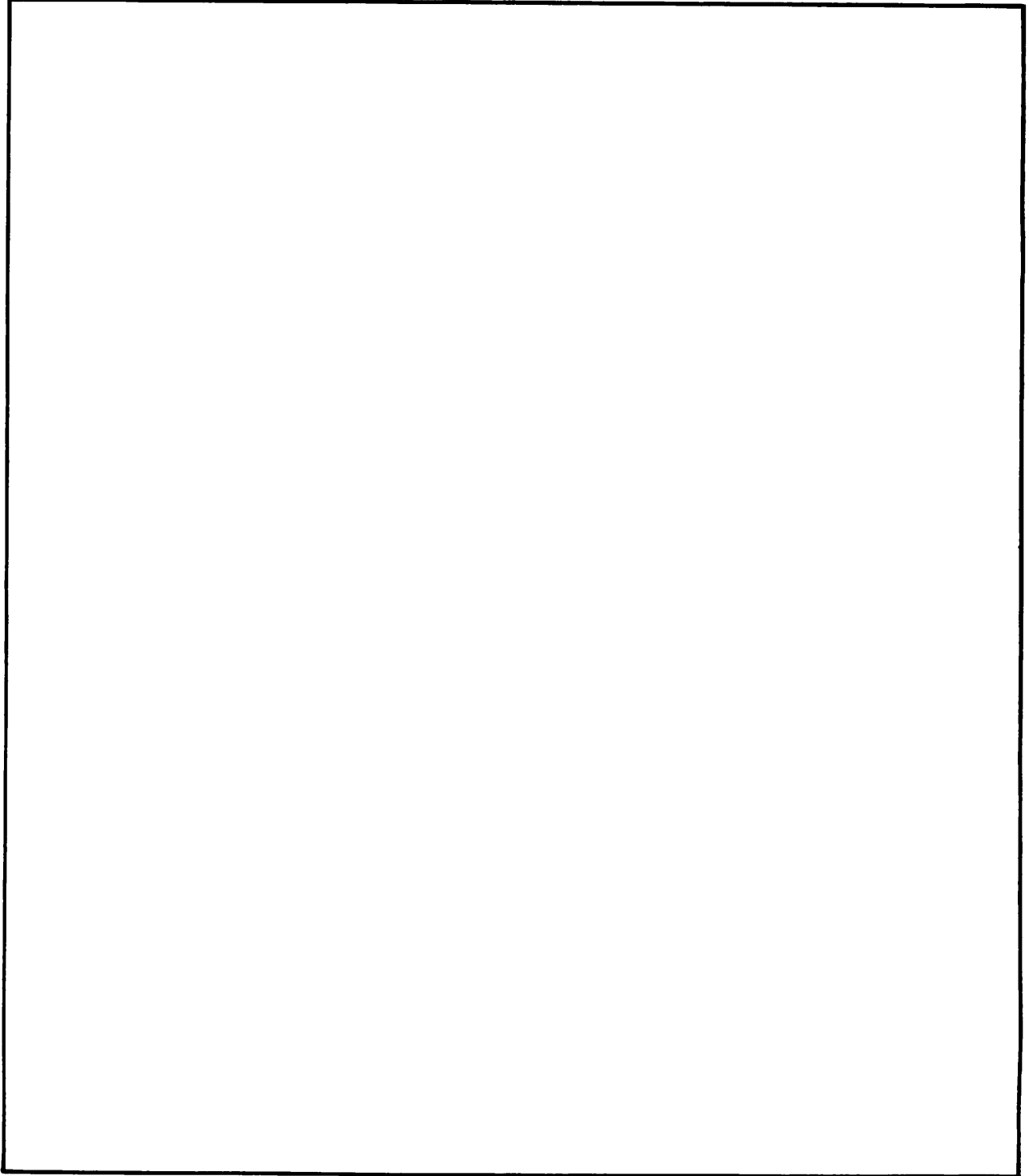
I help my mother every day
And in between I like to play
In the morning, flowers I bring
Good morning, Buddha, I like to sing.
I wash the dishes; I sweep my room
It takes me awhile with my tiny broom.
For lunch, the table I help set
There is milk to pour and napkins to get
After nap, I pick up my toys
That I have shared with girls and boys.
To Amida Buddha, I offer rice
To thank Him for the day so nice.
I next bring the paper to my Dad
And tell him of the day I had
Helping my mother and playing all day
And thinking of Buddha along the way.



COMPASSION

The spirit of Buddha is a great compassion and love to save all people by any and all means. It is the spirit of a mother toward her child nourishing and protecting it; it is the spirit that prompts it to be ill with the sickness of people, to suffer with their suffering. "Your suffering is my suffering and your happiness is my happiness," said Buddha, and he does not forget that spirit for a single moment, for it is the self-nature of Buddhahood to be compassionate. A mother realizes her motherhood by loving her child, then the child reacting to his/her mother's love feels safe and at ease. The Buddha's spirit of compassion is stimulated according to the needs of people; faith is the reaction to this spirit, and it leads him/her to enlightenment.

ME!

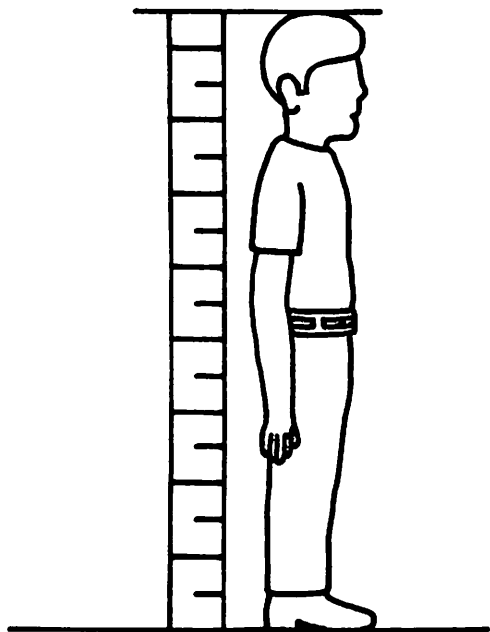
A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, occupying the central portion of the page. It is intended for a child to draw a picture of themselves or write their name.

MY NAME IS

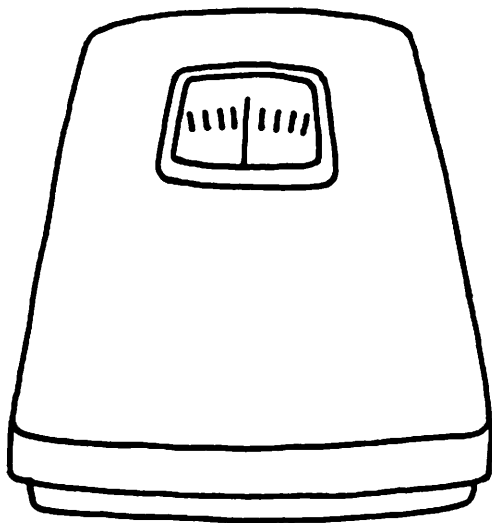


I am _____ years old.

Today's date is:



I am _____ feet _____
inches tall.



I weigh _____ pounds.


This is my face


In temple

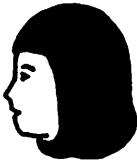
<p>My eyes can see _____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>My ears can hear _____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>My nose can smell _____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>My mouth can say _____</p> <p>_____</p>


My Hair is:


Check the right boxes


	short	
---	-------	--


	straight	
---	----------	--

	medium	
---	--------	--


	wavy	
--	------	--

	long	
--	------	--


	curly	
--	-------	--

	thick	
---	-------	--

Here is a piece of
my hair.

	thin	
---	------	--

--

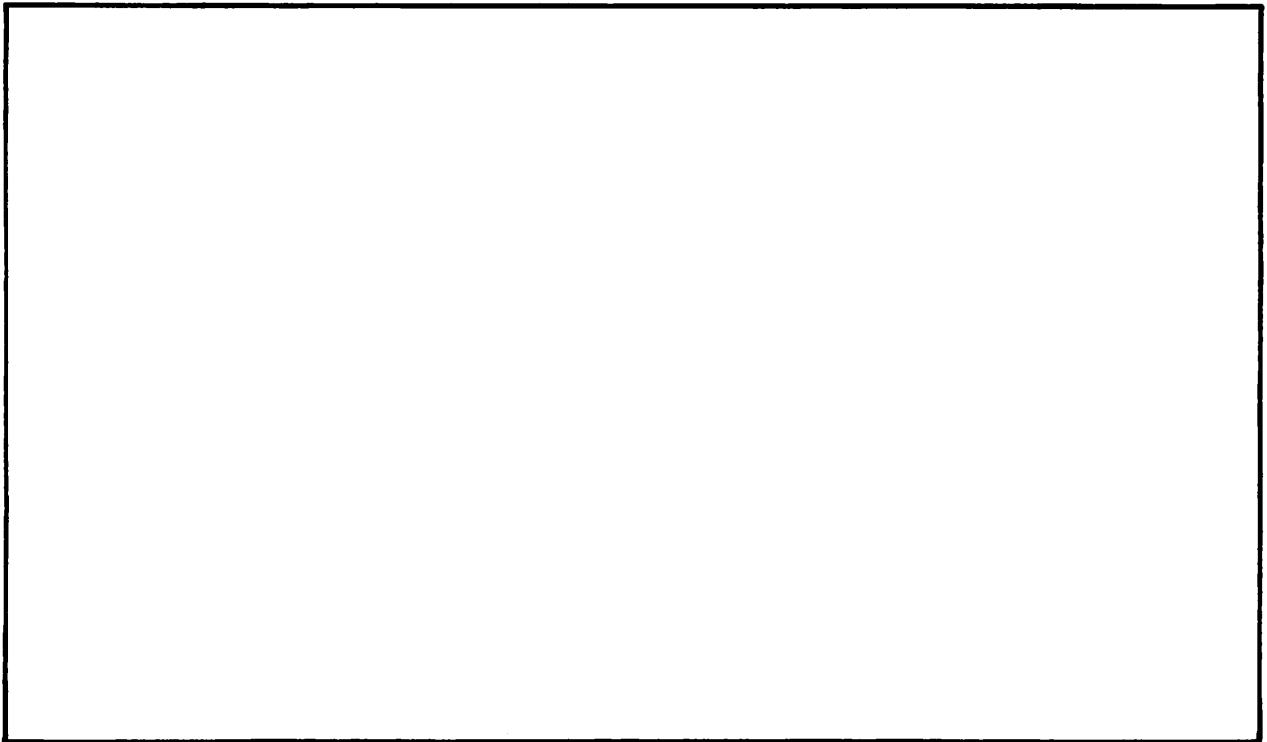
	no hair	
---	------------	--

Please get parental permission.

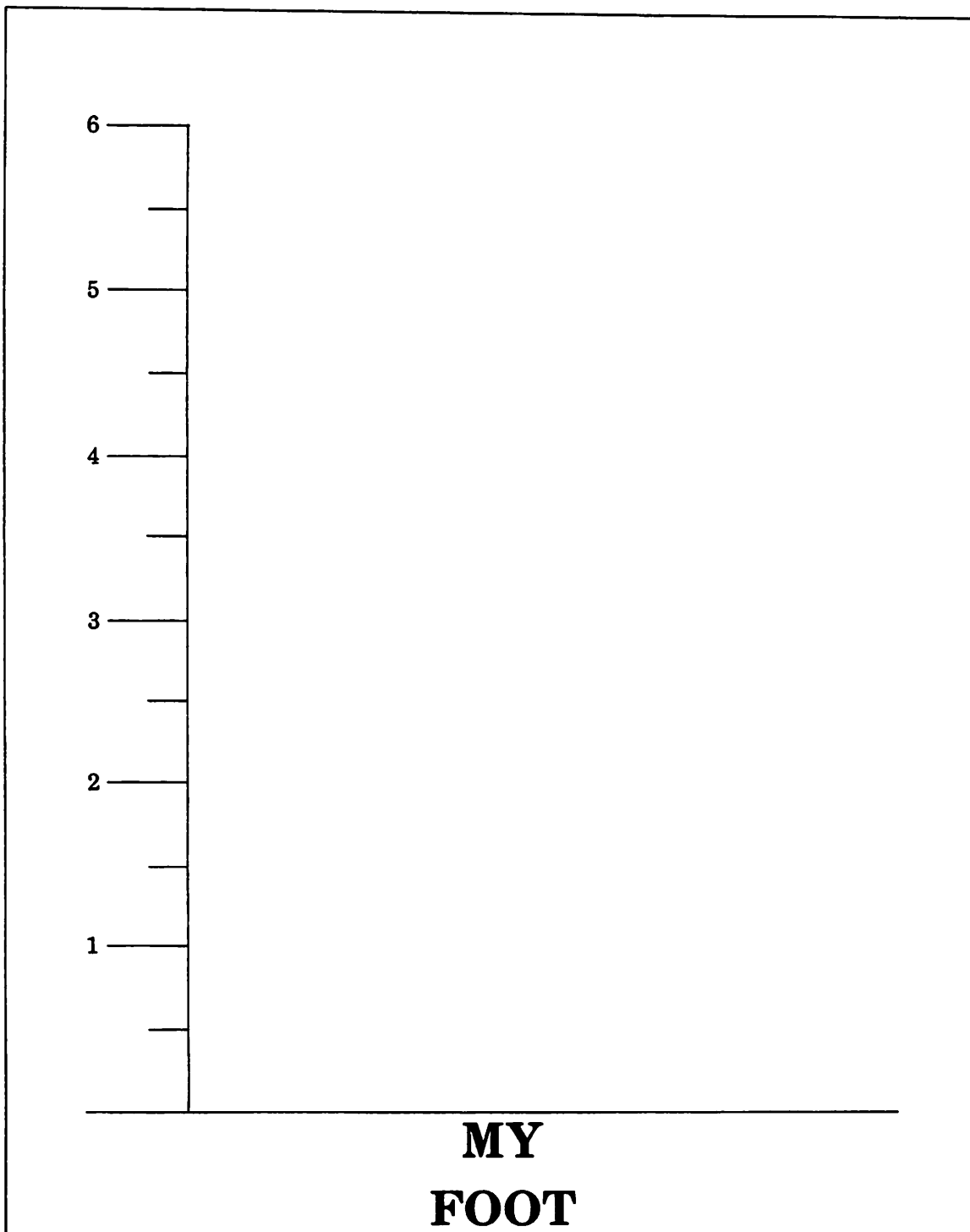
The color of my hair is _____.

My Eyes

This is what they look like

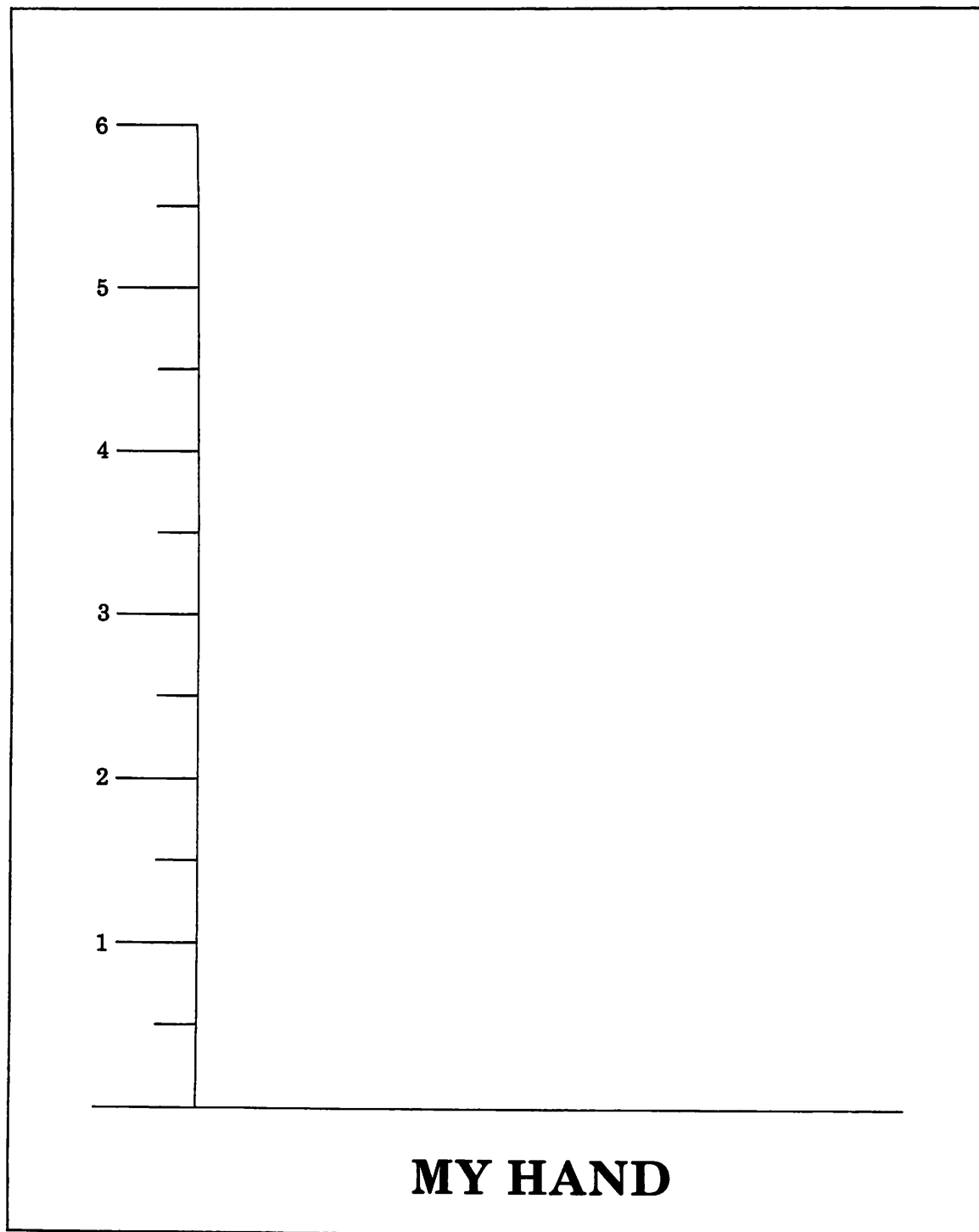


Put your foot on the line. Trace around it.



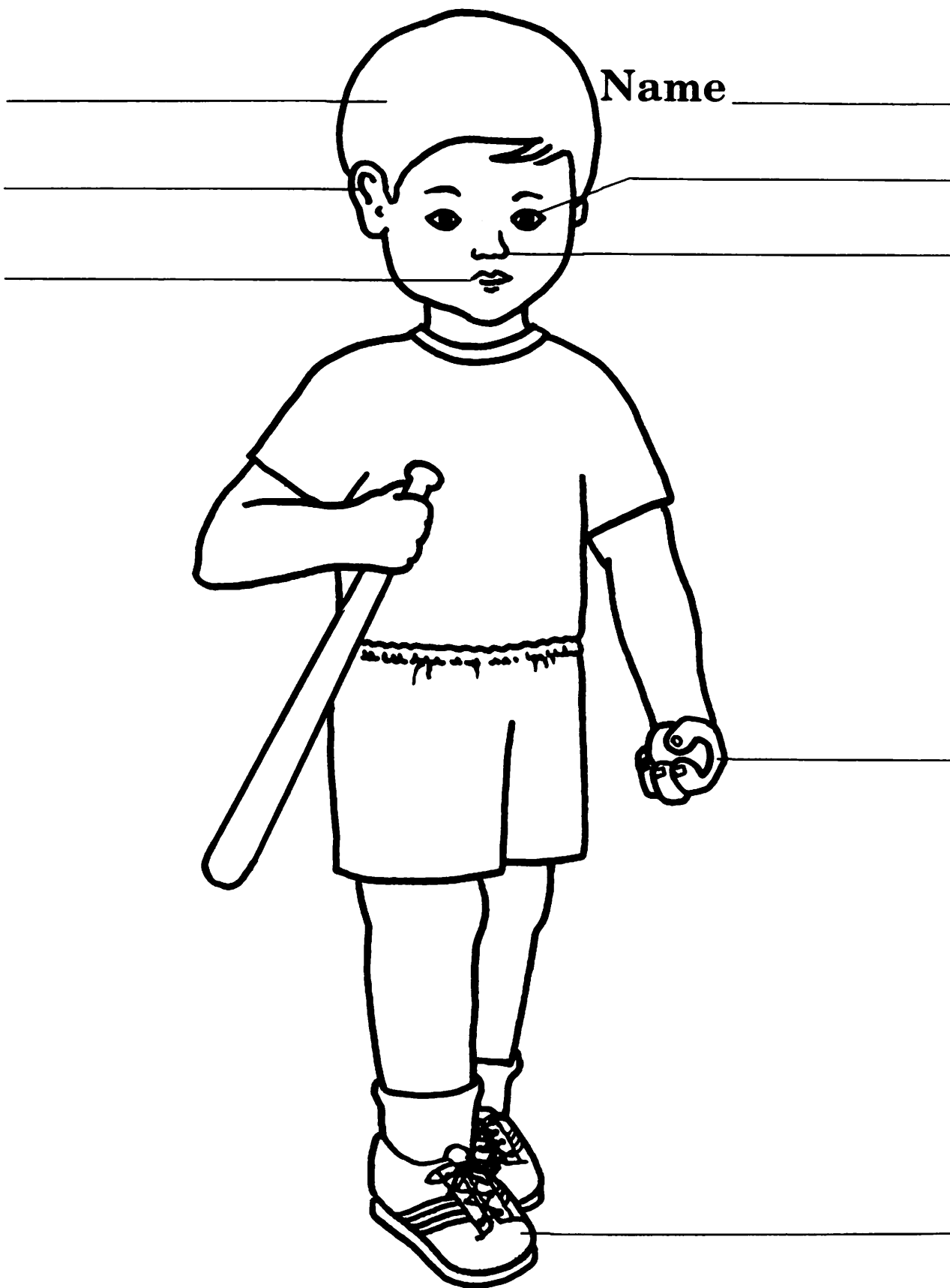
**My foot is
inches long**

Put your hand on the line. Trace around it.

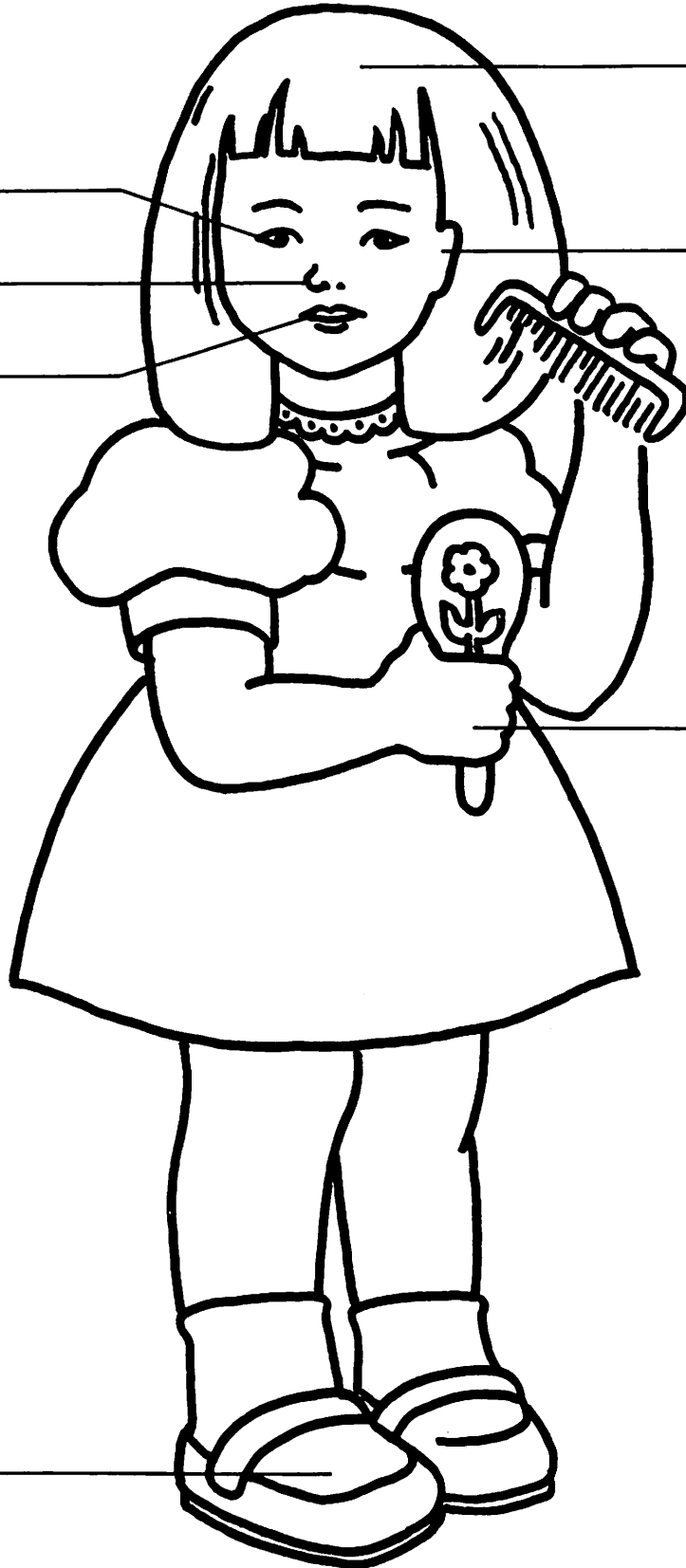


**My hand is
inches long**

Name Body Parts in English and Japanese.

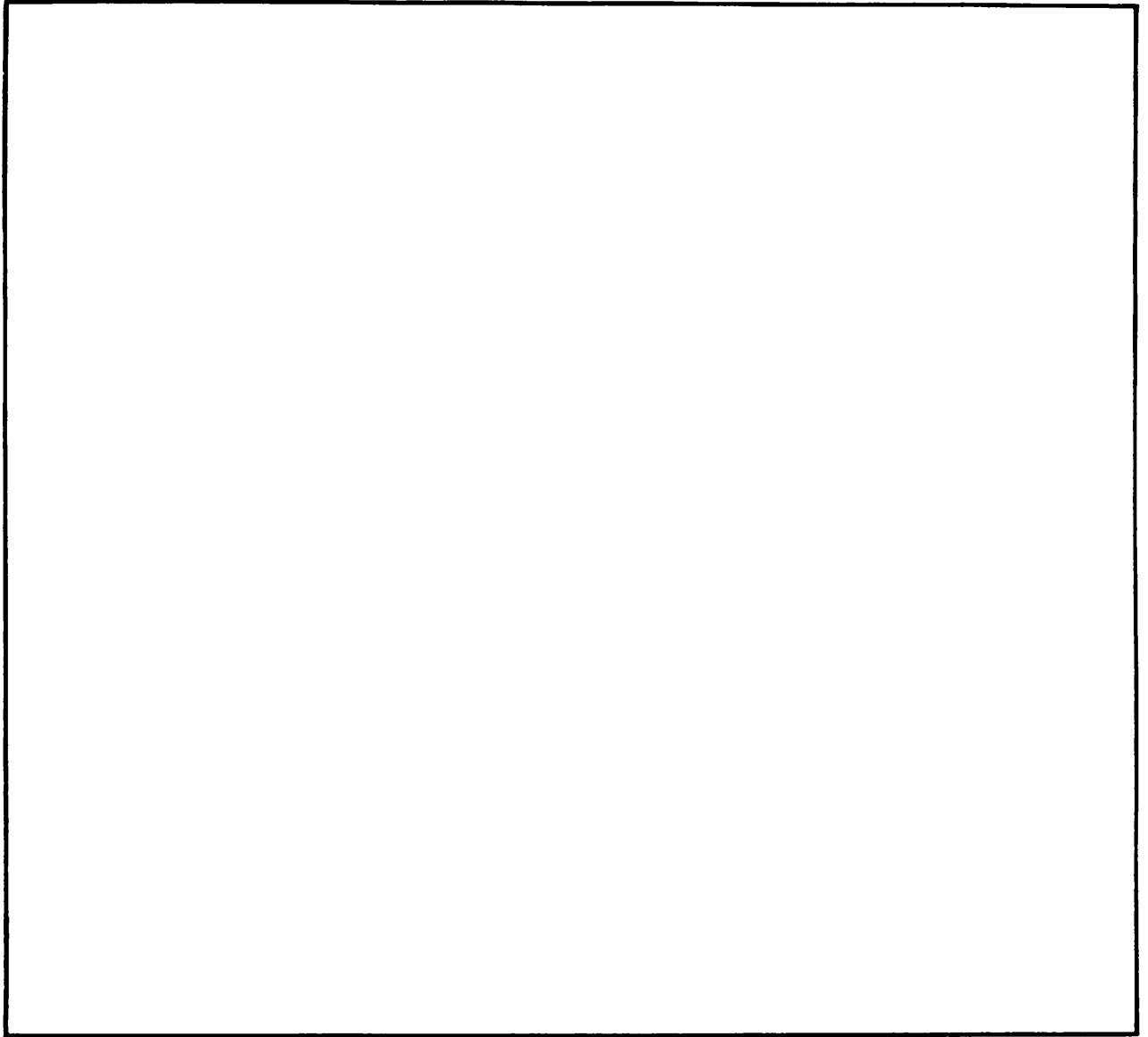


Name Body Parts in English and Japanese.



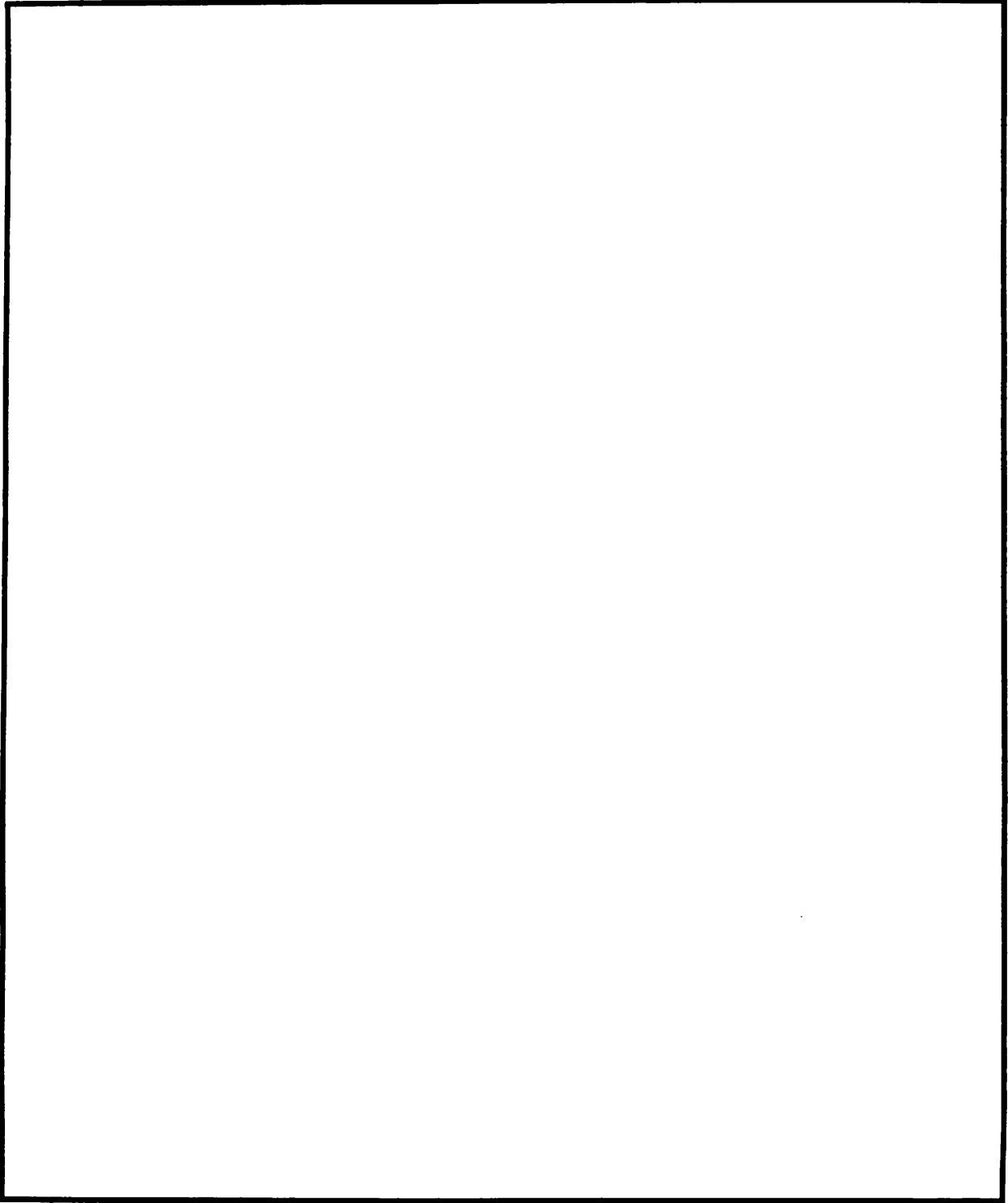
Name

My Temple



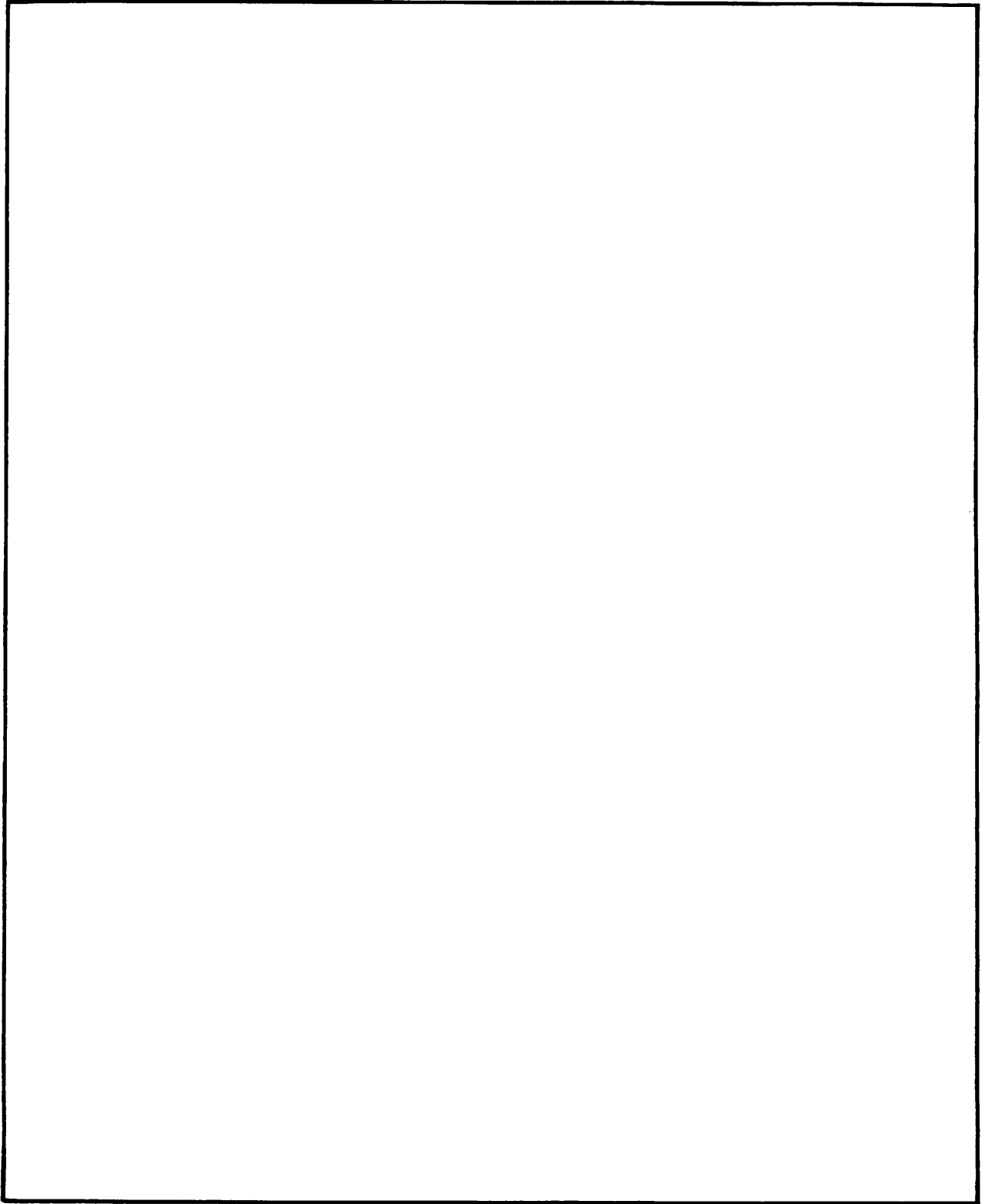
I attend the

MY SENSEI—MY MINISTER

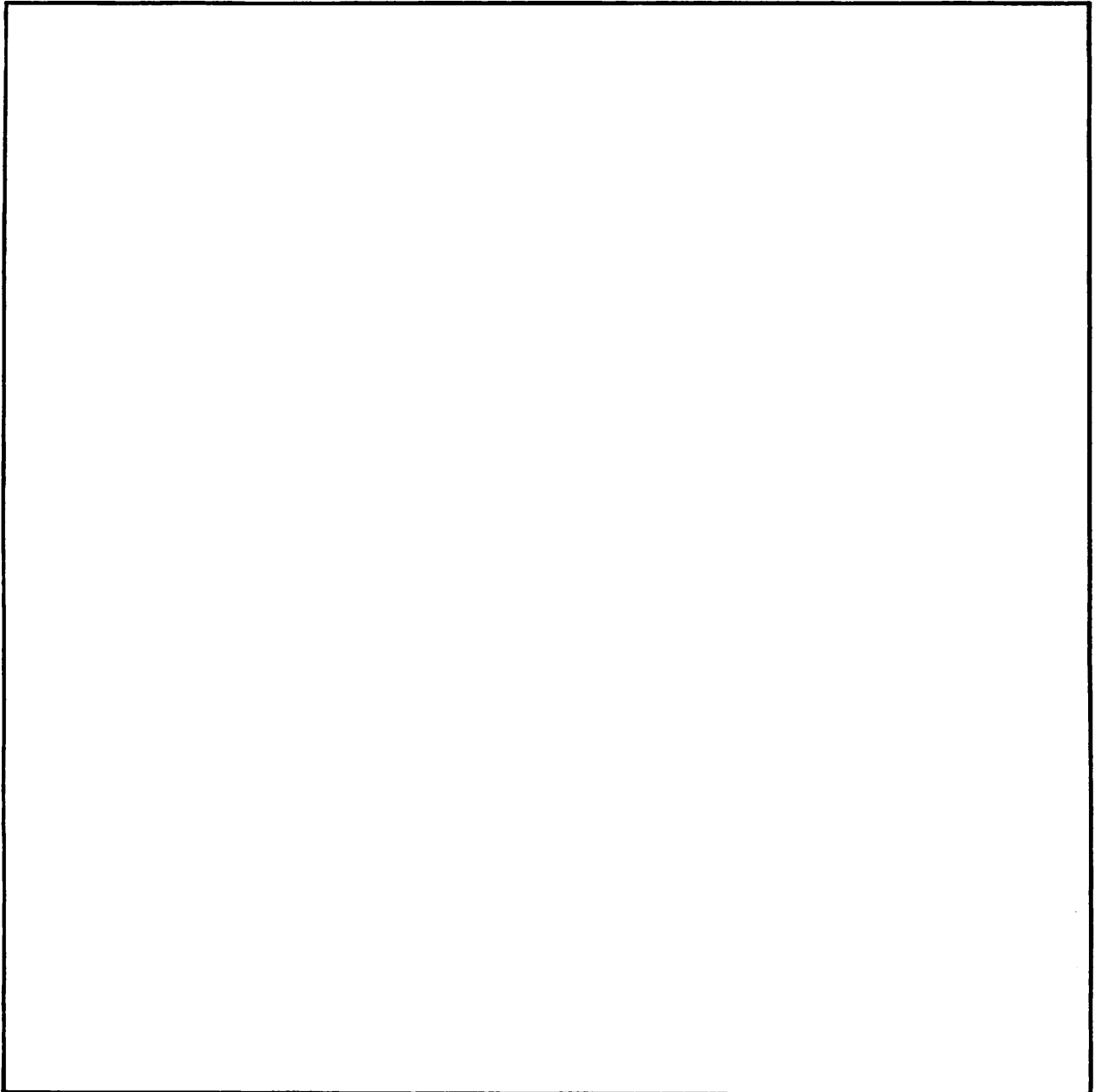


His/Her name is _____

MY TEACHER

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a child to draw or write about their teacher.

MY FRIENDS



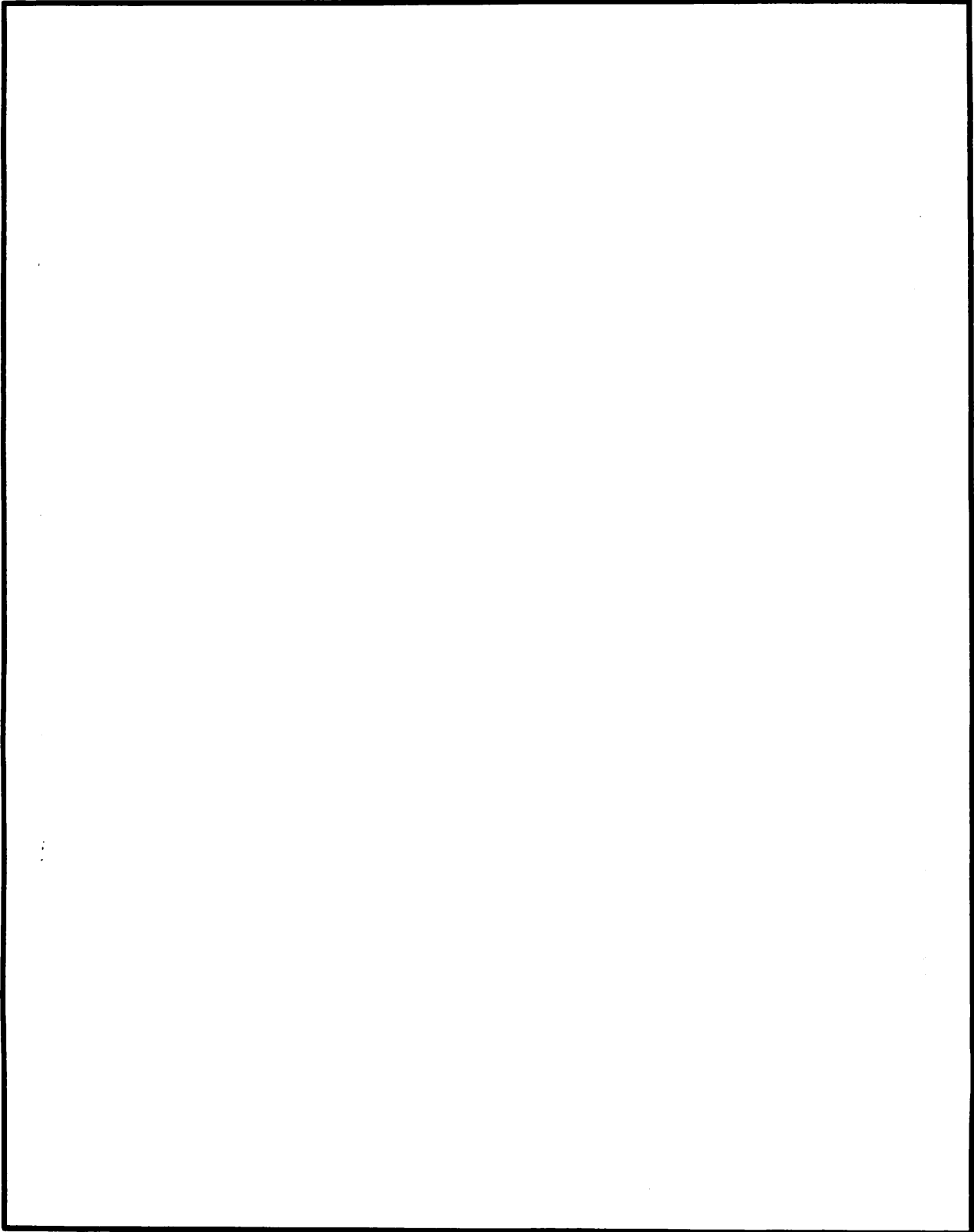
Friend

A true friend, the one with whom a man may safely associate, will always advise sticking closely to the right way, will worry secretly about his friend's welfare, will console him in misfortune, will offer him a helping hand when he needs it, and will always give him good advice. It is very hard to find a friend like this, but one should try very hard to be a friend like this. As the sun warms the fruitful earth, so a good friend stimulates a man.

Things I can do myself.

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

MY FAMILY

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a child to draw a picture of their family.

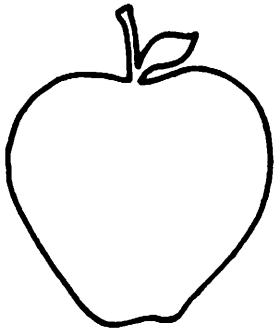
My Favorite Foods

EXAMPLE:

Apple

Candy

Sushi



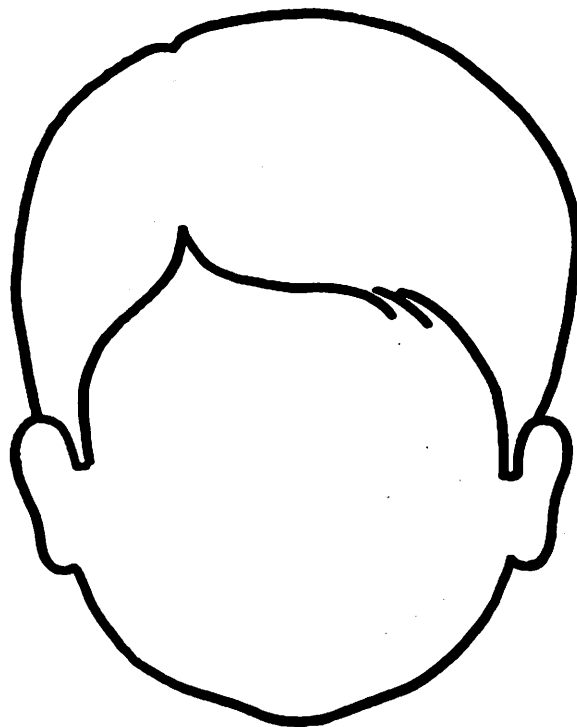
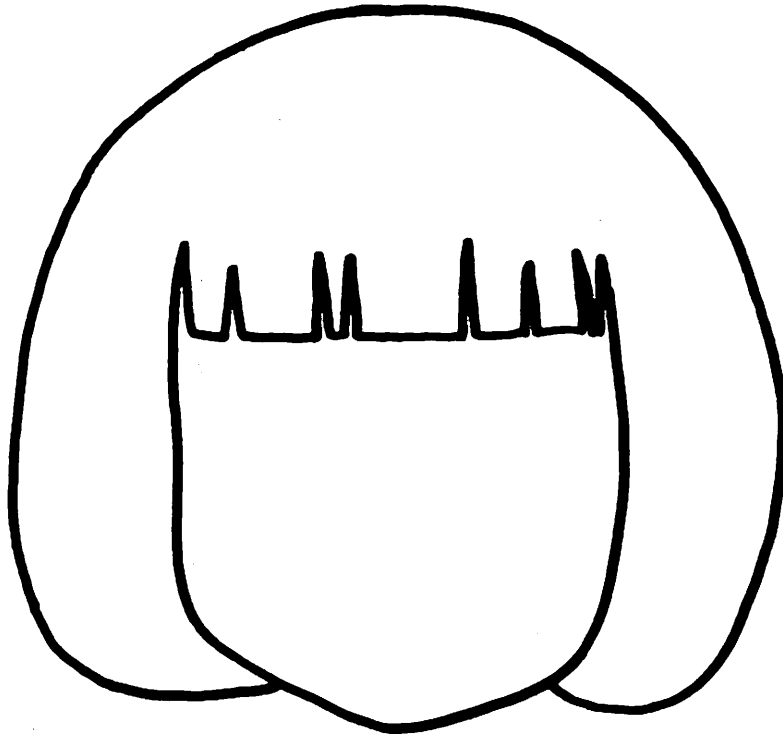
Why is it my favorite food?

My Favorite Toys

Draw your favorite toy.

Describe it:

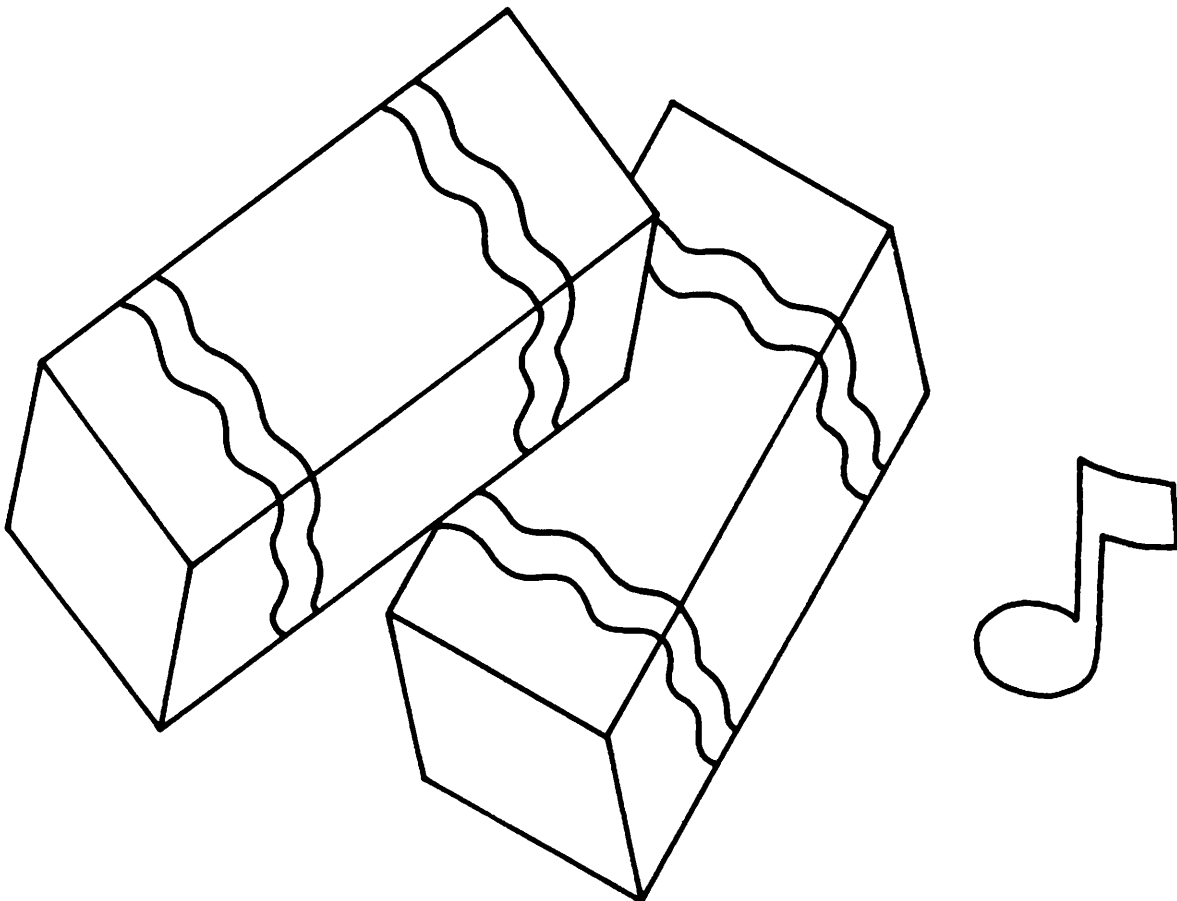
BUDDHA'S HAPPY CHILDREN



RHYTHM BAND INSTRUMENTS



A DRUM



WOODEN BLOCKS

Buddha Loves You

Kimi Hisatsune

Jane Imamura

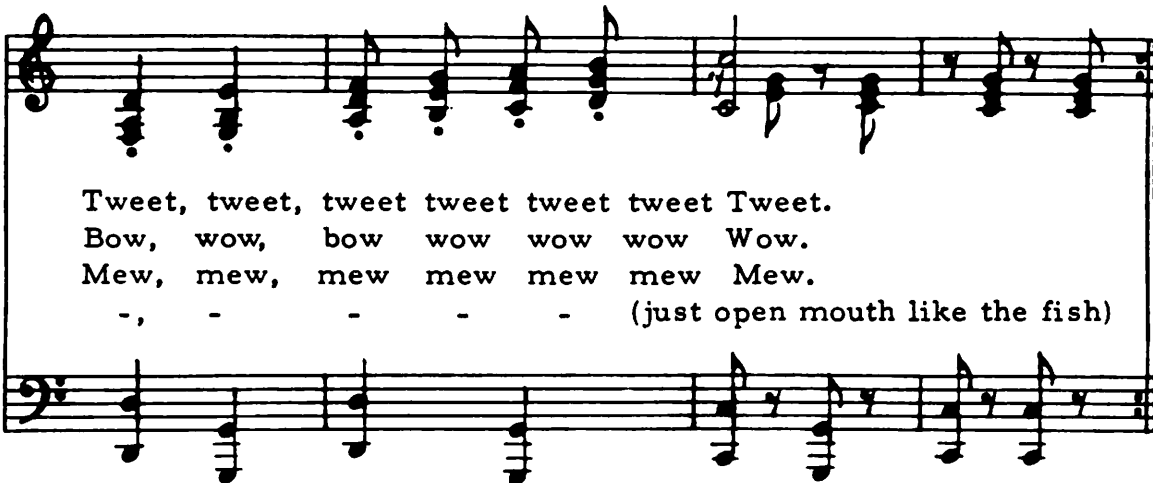
Intro.



1. Fly, fly
2. Run, run
3. Don't cry
4. Swim, swim

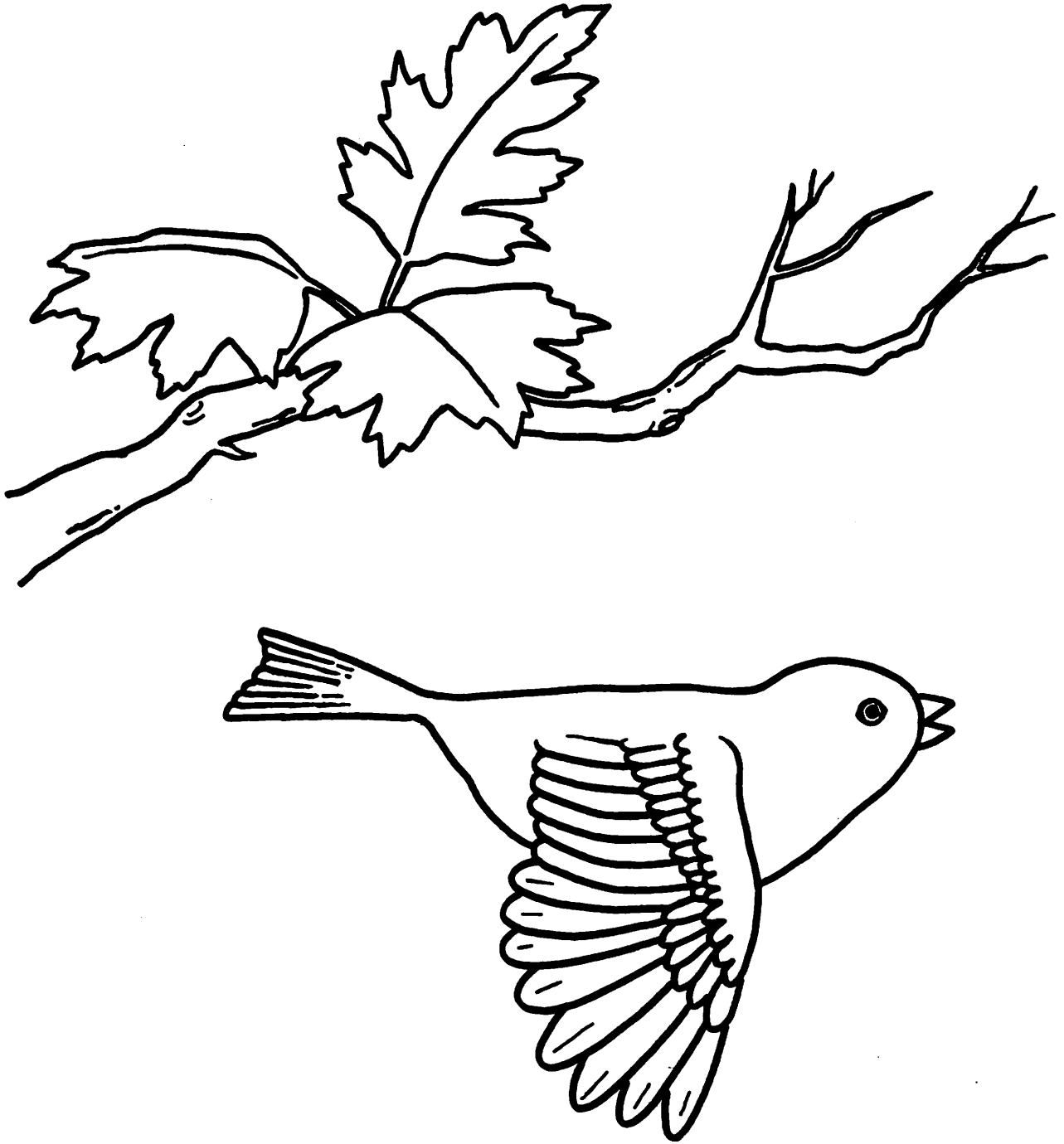


lit - tle bird,	Bud-dha loves you	lit - tle bird
lit - tle pup,	Bud-dha loves you	lit - tle pup
pu - ssy cat,	Bud-dha loves you	pu - ssy cat
lit - tle fish,	Bud-dha loves you	lit - tle fish

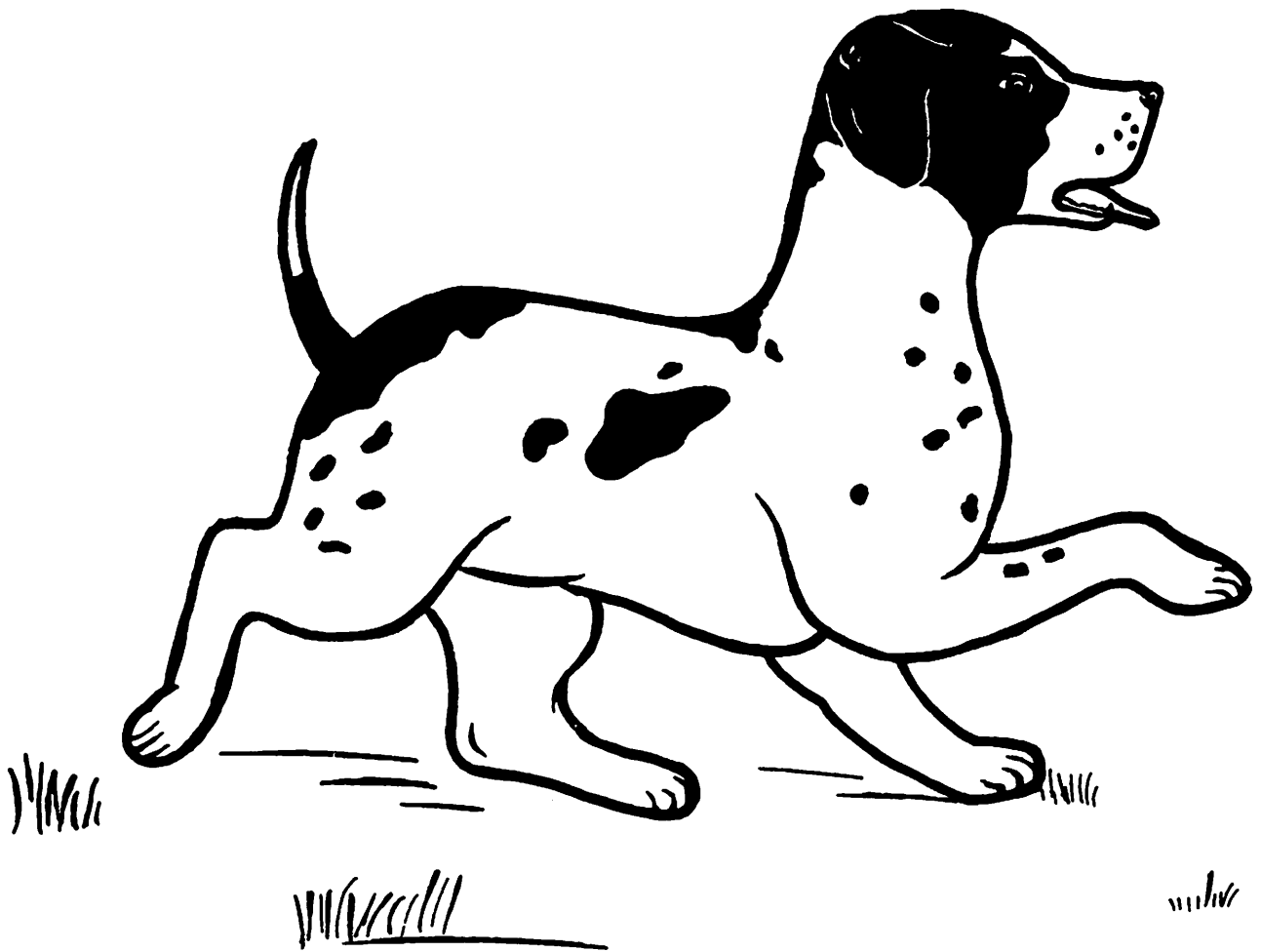


Tweet, tweet, tweet tweet tweet tweet Tweet.
 Bow, wow, bow wow wow wow Wow.
 Mew, mew, mew mew mew mew Mew.
 -, - - - - (just open mouth like the fish)

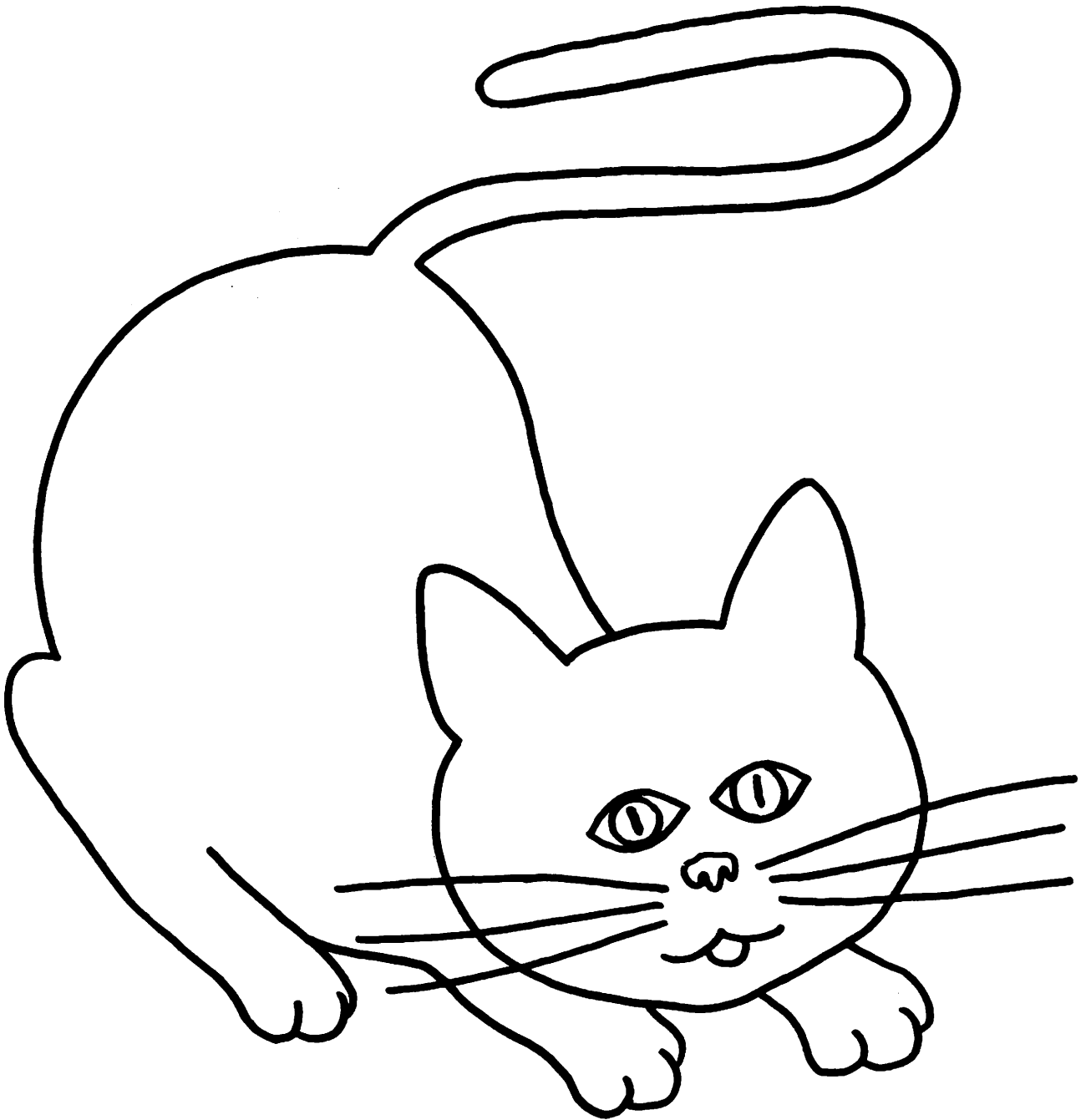
Buddha Loves You Little Bird



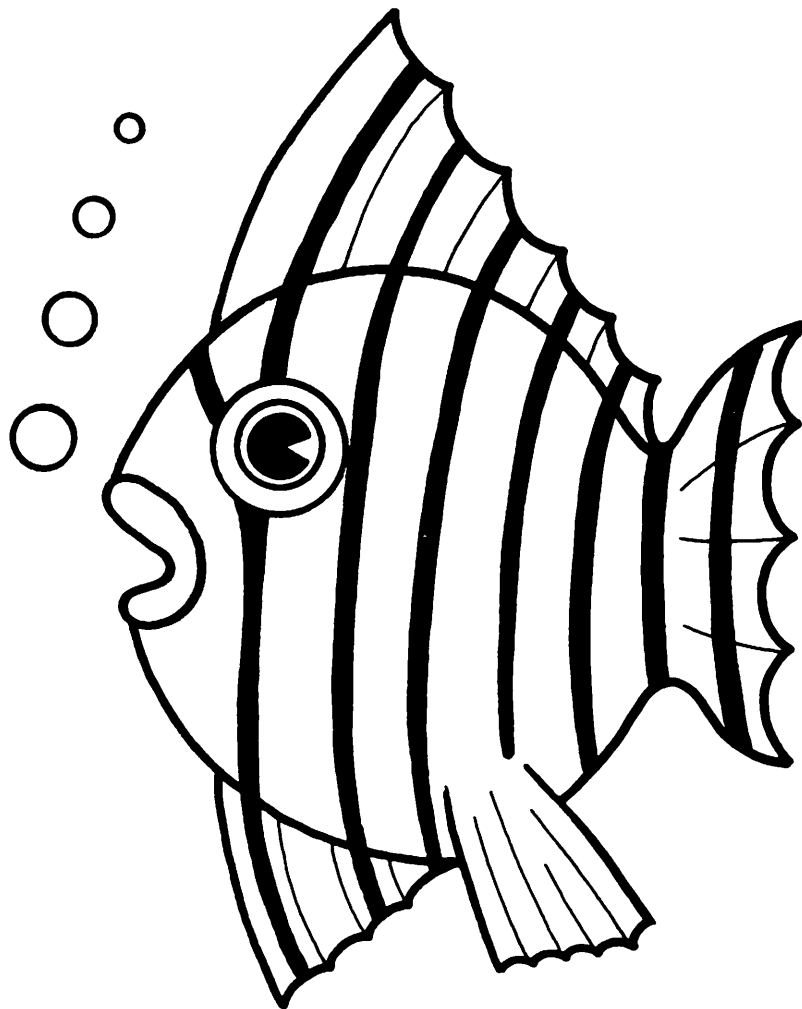
Buddha Loves You Little Pup



Buddha Loves You Pussy Cat



Buddha Loves You Little Fish



WHAT I LIKED THE MOST THIS SUNDAY: _____

WHAT I LIKED THE LEAST THIS SUNDAY: _____

_____ **WAS THE EASIEST FOR ME.**

_____ **WAS THE MOST DIFFICULT FOR ME.**

NEXT WEEK IN CLASS I WOULD LIKE TIME FOR: _____

**WHAT NEW THINGS
DID YOU LEARN?**

**WHAT NEW FRIENDS
DID YOU MAKE?**

**WHAT DID YOU
LIKE THE BEST?**

**WHAT DID YOU
LIKE THE LEAST?**

**WHAT MORE WOULD
YOU LIKE TO LEARN?**

PRE-SCHOOL DHARMA SCHOOL GUIDE PARENT EDUCATION

The following pages are for parents to study and share with their child and family; to assist in keeping the Dharma School child interested in his/her religious education during the week as well as the weekend.

Etsuko Steimetz

THREE TREASURES

Leader:

Hard is it to be born into human life. Now we are living it. Difficult is it to hear the Teachings of the Blessed One. Now we hear it. If we do not deliver ourselves in the present life, no hope is there that we shall be freed from suffering and sorrow in the ocean of birth and death. Let us reverently take refuge in the Three Treasures of the Truth.

Leader and Sangha (in unison):

I TAKE REFUGE IN BUDDHA. May we all together absorb into ourselves the principle of Your Way to Enlightenment and awaken in ourselves the Supreme Will.

I TAKE REFUGE IN DHARMA. May we all together be submerged in the depth of the Doctrine and gain wisdom as deep as the ocean.

I TAKE REFUGE IN SANGHA. May we all together become units in true accord in Your Life of Harmony, in a spirit of Universal Brotherhood, freed from the bondage of selfishness.

Leader:

Even through ages of myriads of kalpas hard is it to hear such an excellent, profound and wonderful doctrine. Now we are able to hear and receive it. Let us thoroughly understand the true meaning of Tathagata's Teaching.

I. SANGHA

A. What is the objective of the Buddhist Dharma School?

The objective of the Dharma School is to develop individuals who will live in accord with the basic aspiration of the Buddhist tradition throughout history. The basic aspiration consists of the following vows:

1. To help alleviate the suffering of all people and all forms of life. Since interdependence, beginning with the most obvious and extending to the profoundly subtle, is the fundamental reality of life, each of us is involved in the well-being of all others. Therefore, as long as there is one unhappy being in the world, no one's happiness is complete. Thus, the Buddhist strives for the happiness of all people, regardless of race, country, or ideology, and of all forms of life, regardless of how mighty or insignificant they may be.

2. To recognize clearly the limitations of self, characterized by self-centered ignorance and destructive passions, and to work tirelessly for their transformation into energies for good and positive action.

3. To learn, master, and realize as much as possible the accumulated wisdom of the ages, so that one may be successful in fulfilling the dual vows of helping all people and transforming the self.

4. To follow the path of the Buddha, so that one may enter the stream of becoming to eventually attain the highest realization of Buddhahood as the final conclusion to the purpose of life.

The Buddhist is not deterred by the immense challenge of his aspirations, for he knows that the practical approach to their fulfillment is to take each step, one at a time, however small they may be, for he knows that what is more significant is not the ultimate goal but the process leading to that goal. The first steps must be taken from the earliest period of conscious childhood.

B. How can we teach Buddhism more effectively?

Parents and teachers can teach Buddhism to others effectively, if we keep in mind the following points and constantly try to perfect ourselves in each of the three ways:

1. Faith: First of all we must understand and appreciate the teachings in order to impart it to others. Shan-tao, the Fifth Patriarch of Shin Buddhism, expressed this thought in a very famous statement:

“First to believe in the teaching oneself; then endeavor to teach others to believe.” Faith is awakening to the truth of Buddha's teaching. It is ultimately the process of becoming the Buddha. When we realize its significance, we will desire to share this understanding.

2. Gratitude: In the Dhammapada there is a well-known passage which reads:

“The gift of religious exceeds all gifts; the sweetness of religion exceeds all sweetness.”

As we receive the gift of Buddha's teaching and realize the “sweetness” of its truth for daily living, we become deeply grateful. This gratitude, arising spontaneously from faith, is the motive for teaching Buddhism to others.

3. Sincerity: Parents or teachers must be, above all else, sincere. Techniques of teaching and knowledge of subject matter are insufficient when sincerity is lacking. Natural sincerity should be nurtured as an outflow of faith and understanding.

We must develop faith, gratitude, and sincerity until they become a free and spontaneous expression of our lives. Only then can there be any effective teaching of Buddhism to others.

C. Which is better to teach first, general Buddhism or Shinshu?

First, it must be remembered that general Buddhism and Shinshu are not two different teachings. Buddhism is one, and they are merely emphasis on different aspects of an integrated whole, although it is true that the emphasis that is expressed in Shinshu is more closely related to everyday living.

Second, as a Shin Buddhist we must appreciate Shinshu awareness of compassion of Amida Buddha. If we understand this we can explain Shinshu through various means: life of Sakyamuni Buddha, parables and Jatakas in the scriptures, fables and stories taken from books, and current events and daily happenings.

Third, it can be easier for children to understand concrete events that occurred in history. For this reason for life of Buddha and general Buddhism might be taught before Shinshu. The understanding of Shinshu requires a certain amount of maturity of both life-experience and background in Buddhism.

Fourth, the important thing, however, is to realize that the compassion of Amida Buddha can be understood by every one, especially a child. This understanding is not necessarily conveyed to the child by words; rather, it may be conveyed by the attitude of the teacher and the atmosphere in which the child is being taught. Both the attitude and the atmosphere must be expressive of the compassion of Amida Buddha.

II. DHARMA

FOUR NOBLE TRUTH:

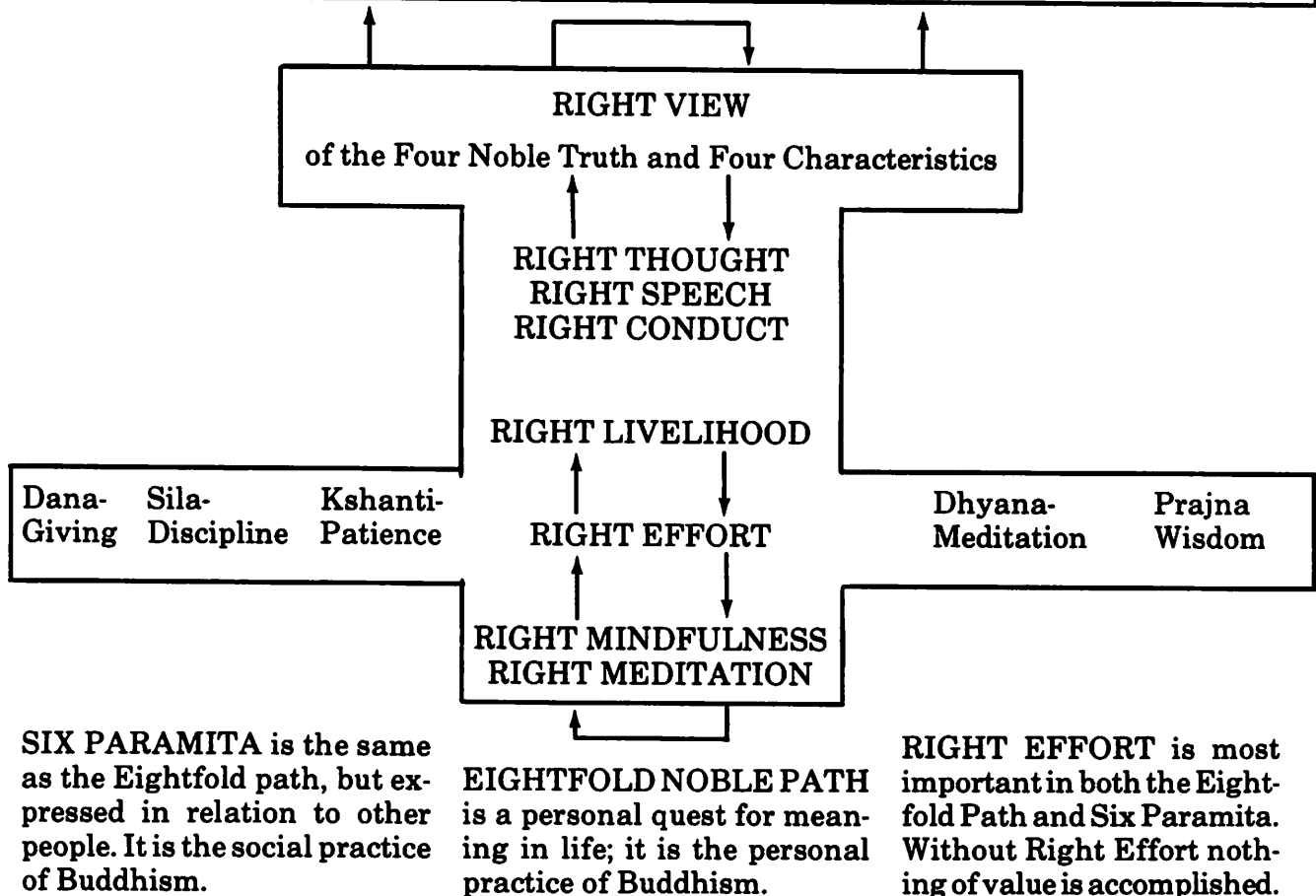
In order to solve the problems that arise in our life, we must have **RIGHT VIEW** of what constitutes our personal, human life.

1. The Noble Truth: Dukkha.
Life is essentially discontent.
2. Second Noble Truth: Cause.
Blind desire causes Dukkha.
3. Third Noble Truth: Nirvana.
Life is peace and fullness.
4. Fourth Noble Truth: Way.
All the teachings of Buddha show the way to uproot blind desire, so that dukkha will vanish and we will live in the peace and fullness of Nirvana.

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE:

In order to live in accord with the nature of things and improve society, we must have **RIGHT VIEW** of the world in which we live.

1. Impermanence: things and conditions in life are constantly changing and shifting.
2. Non-substantiality: change is possible because nothing has a permanent substance, such as form, ego, soul, etc.
3. Dukkha: there arises dukkha in life when we believe that there is permanence and all things have substantiality.
4. Nirvana: to live in accord with (1) and (2) is peace.



A. What is the simple interpretation of the word “Religion”?

In its broadest sense “religion” is the object of our ultimate concern. The equivalent term in Buddhism, shukyo (in Japanese), means “clarification of the fundamental.”

Generally speaking, however, the word “religion” is a Western concept, derived from the Latin “re-ligare”, and in Christian terms “religion” means reuniting man to God, since human troubles began with a fall. If the word “religion” is used in this sense, it does not apply to Buddhism.

Buddhism is essentially a way of life which teaches us to cultivate RIGHT VIEW of life, so that we can live peacefully in harmony with the natural order inherent in life. There is unhappiness, because of wrong view—we are out of focus with reality. In order to attain happiness, fulfillment, and meaning in life we must cultivate RIGHT VIEW, the “right idea”, of what life is all about.

B. What is the basic teaching of Buddhism?

The basic teaching of Buddhism is contained in the Four Noble Truth. It is found in the First Sermon of Sakyamuni Buddha immediately following his Enlightenment.

First Noble Truth: Life is Dukkha (dukkha in pali). Dukkha means “not getting what one wants”. Dukkha describes in one word the human predicament, and we know it through experiences of frustration, unrest, agitation, anxiety, anguish, pain and suffering. Life, as we know it, does not move according to our wishes.

“Not getting what one wants” also implies its reverse: “getting what one does not want”. One does not want to become ill, or old, or die, yet these are the promises of birth. The four basic dukkhas are:

- a. birth
- b. illness
- c. old age
- d. death

The four additional dukkhas of universal experience are:

- e. separation from loved ones, whether in life or death
- f. necessity of having to live with people we dislike, whether at home or at work
- g. unfulfillment of one’s desires
- h. the physical and mental limitations of the human body

Second Noble Truth: Cause of Dukkha is blind desire. Desire itself is neutral, but when it is propelled by selfishness, desire become blind, destructive, and leads to unhappy consequences.

The selfishness of blind desire does not only mean “wanting something”; it goes deeper, it is the basic of “not wanting something” as well as “wanting something.” Selfishness in this sense is not something one acquires after birth; rather it is the life-force which thrusts one into this world. It is existential ignorance.

In the LIGHT OF ASIA Sir Edwin Arnold expresses this as follows:

Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels,
None other holds you that ye live and die,
And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss
Its spokes of agony,
Its tire of rears, its nave of nothingness.

Third Noble Truth: Nirvana is perfect peace. Life is Dukkha, because life is woven from our blind desires and selfishness. Dukkha is the unnatural state.

Life in its true and natural state is perfect peace. There is an inherent order in life which, if we are in tune with to will grant us the fulfillment we seek.

Fourth Noble Truth: the Way to Nirvana. After the Buddha analyzed the problems in life (First Noble Truth), he discovered the cause of the unnatural state (Second Noble Truth). He then proceeded to explain the conditions of the ideal, natural state (Third Noble Truth).

In the Fourth Noble Truth the Buddha taught the way to achieve the perfect peace of Nirvana by eliminating blind desire; and by uprooting the cause of dukkha, vanish its various implications.

The first path that the Buddha taught was the Eightfold Noble Path, but he also taught many paths to people of different capacity. The history of Buddhism down through the centuries in various countries is the rich expression of the range of paths taught by the Buddha.

C. What is a simple way to remember the Eightfold Path?

The Eightfold Noble Path is a general principle that is followed in every effective human activity. When we read a book and gain knowledge, listen to music and enjoy it, take a vacation and learn to relax, etc., it is because we have the “right ideas” in doing these things. If we had no purpose in reading a book, listening to music, taking a vacation, etc., we would not enjoy them, and achieve results.

When we enjoy anything we do, unconsciously the pattern of activity falls into the pattern of the Eightfold Noble Path.

When we take life as a whole and begin to seek meaning and value, the most effective way would be to follow the Eightfold Noble Path. The Buddhist consciously attempts to apply the pattern of the Eightfold Noble Path to his life, so that by gaining the “right idea” about life, he can order his life to give greater happiness and richer fulfillment.

1. Right Views: this means to have the “right idea” about life. In order to correct our vision which is out of focus with the natural order, Buddhism teaches the way to adjust our wrong view to the natural state, so that our vision will be in accord with reality. It is necessary for us to gain the Right View of two truths: first, the Four Noble Truth as a realization of the meaning of life; and second, the Four Characteristics of Life as recognition of the actual state of the world. The Four Characteristics of Life are:

a. Impermanence: Nothing in life remains forever. Everything is in constant change: dreams are realized, hopes are crushed, people die, mountains shift into valleys, the flowers bloom, the seasons swiftly pass.

The impermanence of life has two implications for us:

(1) Impermanence in the forms of sudden tragedy, business failure, illness, and fatal events which upset our commonplace world presents opportunities for self-reflection. From self-reflection we consider the real values of life, and aspire to seek timeless truths which will not change with the shifting conditions of our external world.

(2) Impermanence also implies that we can make our world according to our thoughts and deeds. That is to say, situations in life are not “set”, they can be changed depending upon the will and effort of the individual. The fortunes of one and the status in society are subject to change, and this possibility is the motivation for earnest people to rise beyond their given lot through patience and effort.

b. All things are without permanent substantiality: the natural world about us and the conditions of human life are subject to change — creation and destruction, birth and death, appearance and disappearance — simply because nothing is permanent in terms of form, entity, ego, or soul. Thus, to believe in the permanence of any existence, the self or external world, leads to thoughts and action not in accord with reality. The ideal action is action in accord with non-substantiality, selflessness and non-attachment.

c. Life is Dukkha: people who live against the truths of (a) impermanence and (b) non-substantiality must suffer the consequence of possessing wrong view of reality: dukkha which may be classified into three types.

(1) physical pain which arises from injury and illness.

(2) emotional disturbances which arise from the destruction or loss of precious things, such as loss of prestige, the end of happiness, failure in business, death of a loved one, etc.

(3) existential anxiety which questions the whole value and meaning of life and becomes a channel through which we realize ultimate enlightenment.

d. Nirvana is perfect peace: The state opposite to dukkha is nirvana of perfect peace. One lives in complete awareness of (1) impermanence and (2) non-substantiality; he is in oneness with the natural order inherent in life.

2. Right Thoughts: When we realize that the purpose of Buddhism is RIGHT VIEW of reality attained through constant RIGHT EFFORT, then our thoughts will always be turned toward fuller understanding of what constitutes RIGHT VIEW, and all distracting speeches will be avoided: gossip, slander, frivolity, and untruth.

3. Right Speech: Speech which is the verbal aspect of thought will express only those thoughts conducive to cultivation of RIGHT VIEW, and all distracting speeches will be avoided: gossip, slander, frivolity, and untruth.

4. Right Conduct: Behavior which is the physical aspect of thought will reveal actions which are in consonance with RIGHT THOUGHT aiming at RIGHT VIEW. Actions which tend to increase understanding, such as love and understanding, will be practiced, and those which hinder it will be abandoned.

5. Right Livelihood: Human activity is covered by thought, speech, and action. When the three are guided by RIGHT THOUGHT, RIGHT SPEECH AND RIGHT CONDUCT, the total result will be RIGHT LIVELIHOOD. This leads to a healthy body and mind, permits the full functioning of one's potential. The Eightfold Noble Path leads not only to spiritual realization but also to psychophysical and equilibrium. RIGHT LIVELIHOOD also covers the kind of work we engage in occupations which do not tend to benefit people are avoided, and those which contribute to the happiness of all people are preferred.

6. Right Effort: The idea of RIGHT LIVELIHOOD and its realization is not easy; therefore, extra effort and patience are required. Quick results and easy solutions are not to be expected. RIGHT EFFORT, in the direction of realizing RIGHT VIEW, is strongly emphasized in all forms of Buddhism.

7. Right Mindfulness: effort alone will not be effective; there must be constant awareness of the goal towards which RIGHT EFFORT is applied. Effort which is mis-directed is fruitless and sometimes harmful.

8. Right Meditation: The good results of following the Eightfold Noble Path will reveal themselves gradually only in meditation, because they appear to us through the inner unity and center of peace which can be recognized only in RIGHT MEDITATION. On the other hand, the object of meditation is RIGHT VIEW; again the cycle of following the Eightfold Noble Path is inaugurated. As the cycle is repeated there is progressive growth in the well-being that is attained through approaching RIGHT VIEW.

D. What is the relationship between the Eightfold Noble Path and the Six Paramita?

The Eightfold Noble Path is the personal practice of Buddhism whose objective is cultivation of RIGHT VIEW of life. This personal approach becomes the Six Paramita in contacts with fellow men. This is the social practice of Buddhism which aids man in progressing on the Eightfold Noble Path to RIGHT VIEW.

1. Dana: Charity and kindness to others. The closer we approach the RIGHT VIEW of life, there is dana, a spontaneous giving of self to others, for we come to see the Oneness of life. The highest form of dana in Oneness is characterized by Three Purities:

purity of the giver: the giver is free of selfish motives. Giving ends at the moment of the act; one is no longer tied to the objects involved in giving. Any gesture whatsoever of appreciation from the receiver is not expected.

purity of the gift: all attachments to the relative value of the gift, whether it be material goods, a helping hand, kind words and smile, etc. is no more.

purity of the receiver: the giver sees no receiver in the sense of attachment of any kind. in interdependence the giver becomes the given.

2. Sila: personal discipline. Personal discipline is the mastery over self, not in the sense of suppression, but as a free and spontaneous expression of a mature individual. Compassion is incomplete until personal discipline no longer becomes an effort. We cannot help others, unless we are able to help ourselves.

3. Kshanti: patience. The practices of dana and sila, which are the external and internal disciplines of the way, cannot be accomplished overnight. They require patience which is the key to the successful attainment of meaningful goal. In Buddhism patience, fortitude, and perserverance are stressed, because the timeless value of an act is determined by the length and depth of patience put into an act.

4. Viriya; effort. Patience and effort go hand and hand, and one cannot do without the other for successful results. Nothing in life of value is accomplished without a struggle.

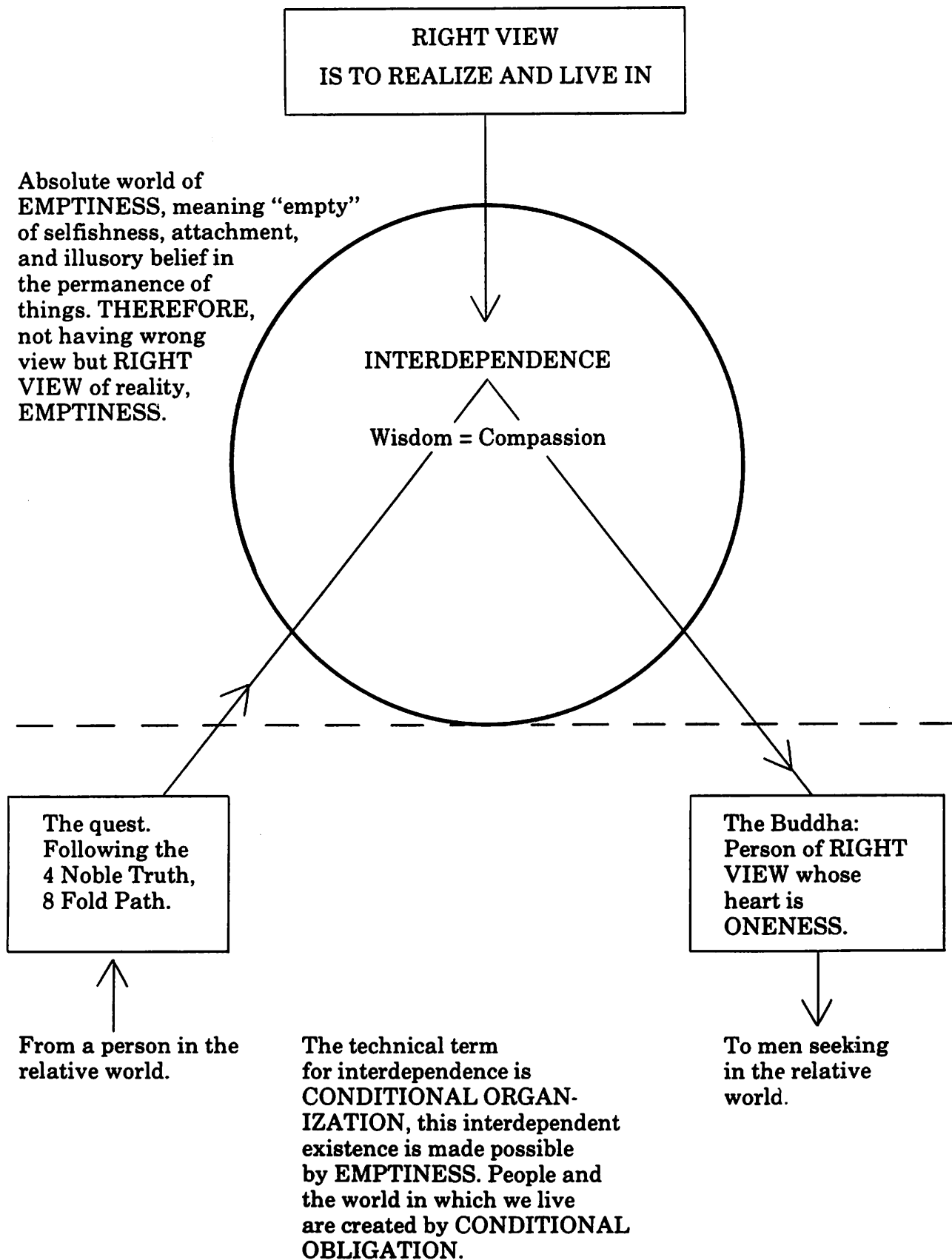
5. Dhyana: meditation. Meditation means to reflect on RIGHT VIEW, its meaning and its relationship to daily life. Through meditation in solitude, the Buddhist sees the deepening center of peace within himself as the result of constant effort.

6. Prajna: wisdom. Prajna is the eye of wisdom which developes RIGHT VIEW to its most perfect vision. It is seeing things, including the self, as they are devoid of self-centered ignorance and blindness. When prajna expressed in action is dana; therefore the cycle of the Six Paramita is repeated once again until there is a spiral progression to absolute RIGHT VIEW where prajna and dana become one, and every expresion of the one who has attained becomes prajna and dana is one. Prajna is supreme wisdom, and dana is supreme compassion; together they form the perfection of personality, the Buddha.

The original Sanskrit terms for the Fourth Noble Truth, the Way, is “marga” which is a noun derived from a verb meaning “to seek, to strive.”

The Eightfold Noble Path and the Six Paramita possess significance for all the diverse schools and sects of Buddhism, for their primary purpose to awaken man to the fact that he must “seek” and “strive”, if he wishes fulfillment in his heart, peace in here and now, and a lasting happiness beyond time and space.

III. INTERDEPENDENCE



A. What is reality in Buddhism?

The reality of life is interdependence, beginning with the most obvious and extending to the profoundly subtle. Right view and prajna is to see this truth clearly by fully realizing that:

1. When we live, disregarding the vast interdependence of life there is unhappiness, and when we live in full awareness of its complete workings, there is happiness (Four Noble Truths).

2. Impermanence and non-substantiality are integral aspects of interdependency, and when we live in harmony with this reality, there is smooth functioning of life. (Four Characteristics of Life).

3. The purpose of Buddhism is to achieve RIGHT VIEW or prajna regarding interdependency, and the teachings are guidepost to attaining the realization. (Eightfold Noble Path).

4. Positive action in interdependence is dana and that this is the only meaningful action which has timeless value (Six Paramita).

Interdependence as the basis of Buddhism was analyzed by Nagarjuna the Father of Mahayana Buddhism, as follows:

1. Interdependence in one aspect is known as Emptiness (sunyata). Emptiness does not mean non-existence or nothingness; rather it is the logical development of the view of nonsubstantiality. It means that all things are devoid of permanence, thus making change and progress possible. If things had a permanent characteristic, life would be static and barren and sterile. It is because of Emptiness that life is dynamic: birth and creation, new happenings daily, dreams realized, unheard of achievements possible. At the same time, because of Emptiness we experience old age and death, values change, memories fade away, dreams come to an end. Emptiness is the basis of the interdependence of life, because when all existence is "empty" of an isolating characteristic, all life and things are organically related. We fail to see this when we set up false distinctions of self and others; creating barriers and hindrances, we establish the illusory world of manyness on false grounds.

In modern physics the objects we see in this world are referred to as mass. This mass is not a substance in the sense of a solid body, but a flow of energy which we give the name paper, pencil, book, house, man, flower, etc. When the time comes these entities undergo changes and we say: "the paper is burned, the pencil is used up, the house is demolished, man dies, flower withers, etc." Emptiness is equivalent to energy, and the mass evident to our eyes is equivalent to Conditional Organization.

2. Interdependence in another aspect is known as Conditional Organization (pratitya-samutpada). This lack of permanence opens the possibility of infinitely varied combinations of conditions, producing the things and events of the world. To this conjunction of conditions we give the name birth, creation and realization. The dispersal of conditions, on the other hand, we call death, destruction, and annihilation. This is conditional organization.

From the aspect of higher truth there is no birth and death, no creation and destruction, no realization and annihilation: simply the gathering and dispersing of conditions made possible by Emptiness. Based on Emptiness, the world is created by Conditional Organization. To things and events, resulting from the shifting combination of conditions, we project subjective coloring and attach names. We experience dukkha when we create attachments to the name, clinging to it as if it were reality, when in fact it is only a mere shadow of reality. To discard attachment means to discard the clinging to the name, the illusion, and to live in reality, without being swayed by apparent changes which are but changes in the shadows of man's projections.

The insights of Emptiness and Conditional Organization form the basis of Buddhist thought. They are the contents of suchness (tathata). The Russian Buddhist scholar, Stcherbatsky, expressed the essential relationship between the two in the following manner:

“That the term Sunya is in Mahayana a synonym of dependent existence (pratitya-samutpada) and means not something void, but something ‘devoid’ of independent reality (svabbhava-sunnya), with the implication that nothing short of the whole possess independent reality, and with the further implication that the whole forbids formulation by concept or speech (nisprapanca) since they can only bifurcate (vikalpa) reality and never directly seize it — this is attested by an overwhelming mass of evidence in all Mahayana literature.” (THE CONCEPTION OF BUDDHIST NIRVANA, Leningrad, 1927, p. 43)

B. Where does the basic difference lie between the different sects of Buddhism?

The basic difference between the many sects of Buddhism appears in the *approach* to realizing RIGHT VIEW. In the sutras Sakyamuni says: “I teach the truth with One Voice, but men interpret it differently according to their capacities.”

The different interpretations were based upon the diverse needs, temperaments and mental and physical capacities of the direct disciples of Buddha, and of the spiritual geniuses down through the centeries.

The schools variously stress non-ego, prajna, discipline, emptiness, oneness, etc., but Shin Buddhism stresses compassion as the dynamic essence of interdependence. This essence is embodied in Amida Buddha, the Buddha of immeasurable life and immeasurable light.

E. What does Tripitaka means?

Tripitaka is the name for the collection of Buddhist scriptures, which has three main divisions, and, literally means ((three” (tri) “collections” (pitaka). Unlike the single volume scriptures of other religions, such as the Bible and Koran, the Buddhist scriptures contain dozens of major sutras and thousands of lesser texts. The three divisions of the collection are:

1. Sutra: the scriptures of Buddhism, containing teachings, philosophical poems, and devotional verses.
2. Vinaya; the disciplinary codes compiled to keep order in the Sangha fellowship of monks and nuns.
3. Abhidharma: the philosophical and metaphysical studies on the teaching which were compiled at a stage later than the sutras and vinayas.

D. What is meant by Mahayana and Hinayana? Why do we follow the Mahayana?

Mahayana and Hinayana are the two general distinctions made in Buddhism by Mahayana Buddhists, and the terms mean literally “Great” (maha) “Vehicle” (yana) of salvation. Today the term Theravada (school of Elders) is used in place of Hinayana to avoid the latter’s derogatory connotations.

The only difference between Mahayana and Hinayanas is the attitude they respectively took in attempting to correctly practice the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha. The Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, etc., attempts to follow the words of the Buddha to the letter, believing that this is the the path of the earnest Buddhist. The Mahayana schools, on the other hand, in Tibet, China, Japan and other Far Eastern countries, believe that the true practice is to live up to the spirit of the teaching rather than to the mere letter. Both are, however, complementary.

We follow Mahayana Buddhism, because we believe that the essential intent of Sakyamuni Buddha's life and teaching is found in the Mahayana scriptures which expound the possible enlightenment of all men.

E. What is the difference between Zen and Shin Buddhism? Please give us a simple and direct answer?

Zen teaches a person the way to realize prajna or pure wisdom by shattering the blind ego which alienates him from life. The method used is the transcendence of ordinary reason and logic and attainment of pure wisdom, to see into the reality of life. Pure wisdom however, functions in and through ordinary reason and logic.

Shin Buddhism teaches a person the way to realize prajna which is contained within the experience of compassion originating from the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and Immeasurable Light. The Compassion of Buddha transforms blind ego into the highest good.

Zen emphasizes that the shell of blind ego must be broken from within; Shin that the shell can be broken only from without, as in incubation. Whether the source is within (prajna) or without (compassion), the ultimate experience is to be freed of the hard crust of ego, so one can life freely in everyday reality.

F. What does selflessness mean?

Selflessness is the result of living in interdependence. It means to rid oneself of blind ego, self-centered desire and false self-sufficiency which ultimately set people against each other. Selflessness does not mean to lose one's identity or individuality; rather it means to become increasingly less of the undesirable aspects of self and to become progressively more of the desirable aspects of true life.

G. What is meant by Buddha-nature? What shall we do to cultivate Buddha-nature?

Buddha-nature is the potentiality within each person to achieve selflessness or true selfhood. In order to cultivate Buddha-nature, we follow the teachings of Buddha and practice the basic teachings which will lead to right view.

H. How will we know when we reach enlightenment? Is it possible to reach enlightenment in this life?

Enlightenment is the final perfection of RIGHT VIEW, seeing everything in its true light. It is complete awareness of Interdependence and living a life of selflessness. It is the ultimate stage in the cultivation of Buddha-nature, Buddhahood.

To know what enlightenment is, one must become enlightened. There is a famous phrase in which this is expressed thus; "Only a Buddha can recognize a Buddha." To know the taste of water, one must drink the water. To know what love is, one must experience love.

However the state of enlightenment is explained in this way; enlightenment means to live in prajna, and the wisdom gained in prajna is turned into compassion for fellow beings who have not attained the prajna. This compassion is a selfless compassion; that is, the concern for others is not based upon self centered motives, but rather it is a spontaneous and creative concern for the well being of all life.

It is possible to reach enlightenment in this life, but it is never a state which is reached where one can say: "I have attained," or "I am enlightened" Such an enlightenment is already dead, for enlightenment is a process, an eternal unfolding.

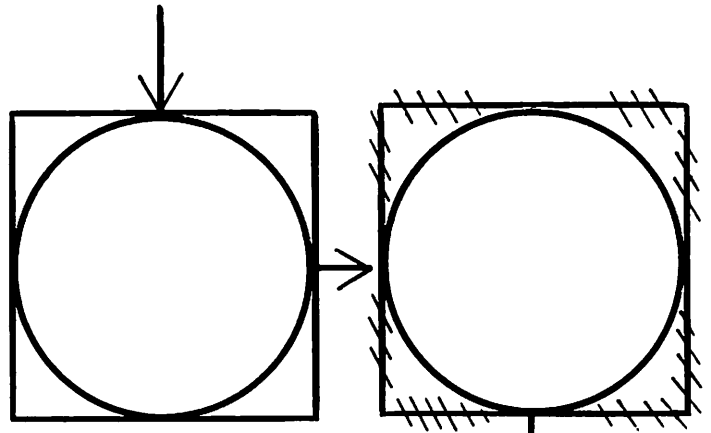
The Three Aspects of Buddhahood

The absolute aspect: Dharmakaya

**Circle without a circumference:
without beginning and without end;
formless, colorless, nameless.**

The historical aspect: Nirmanakaya

**Oneness as the heart of man:
with beginning (birth) and
with end (death) of Sakyamuni
Buddha (represented by square)
whose enlightenment is reali-
zation of Suchness (represented
by a circle).**



The spiritual aspect: Sambhogakaya

**Suchness as timeless spiritual principle:
with beginning (Bodhisattva
Dharmakara, Hozo Bosatsu)
and without end (Amida Buddha):
Suchness expressed in finite
terms but without historicity.**

Faith: Shinshu idea of enlightenment

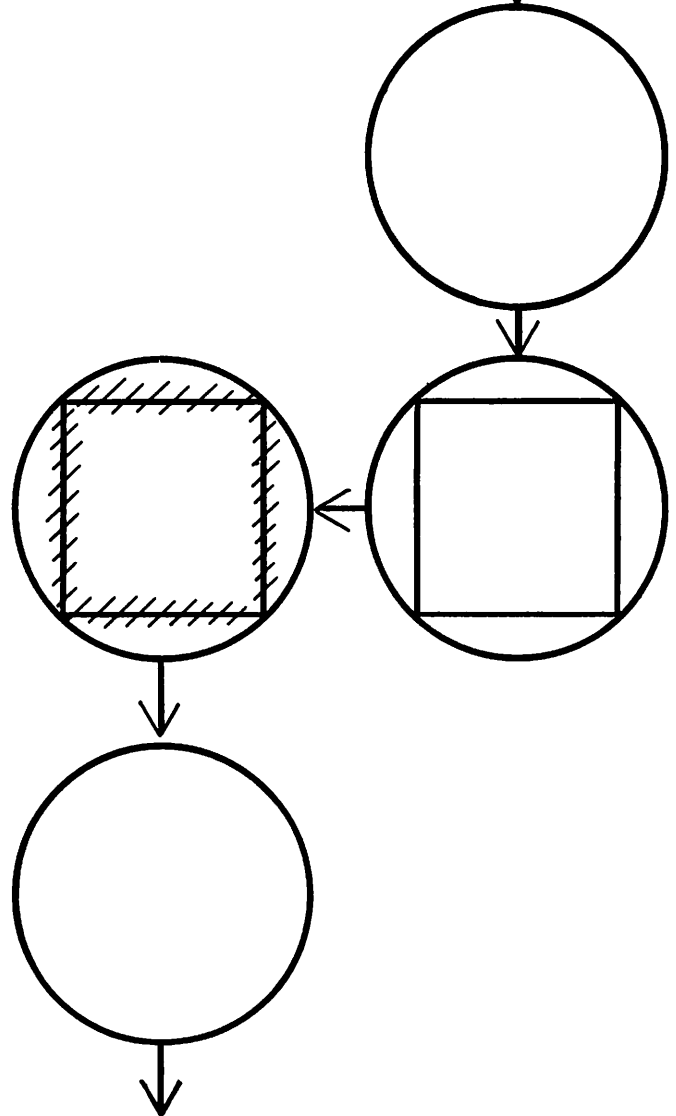
Man (square) embraced in Amida Buddha who is living aspect of Suchness (circle). The complete realization of this state is Namu Amida Butsu.

Buddhahood: All men become Buddhas

When the physical aspect of man (represented by square) returns to dust, the enlightened and the faithful become Buddhas which means living Suchness.

Oneness: The ground of existence

All historical and spiritual events occur on the common ground of Suchness (tathata) which has two integral parts: Emptiness and Conditional Origination. The latter is the basic of history; the former of spiritual values.



A. What is meant by the three bodies of the Buddha, or Trikaya?

The three bodies of the Buddha, or Trikaya, are different aspects of Reality viewed in terms of enlightenment, that is, Buddhahood. They are not three separate “bodies” but aspects of one Buddha, the realization of Suchness.

Dharmakaya: Suchness in its absolute aspect is formless, colorless and nameless; it is beyond dualistic reasoning and verbal description. It is the circle without a circumference, inconceivable by conventional knowledge; without beginning and without end.

Nirmanakaya: Prince Gautama became the enlightened one, the Buddha, when he perceived reality. Reality and suchness existed prior to the Buddha, but it was never realized in its perfect state in any one; this realization had to await the Buddha. Through the person of the Buddha, the inconceivable became the conceivable.

The insight into reality is prajna. The eye of wisdom sees into the real cause of unhappiness, the loneliness, and frustration rampant in society, and as the result of this penetration into the nature of existence, the heart of wisdom is stirred to action. This stirring of the heart is (karuna). The expression of supreme compassion is the unfolding of the Buddha’s personality; it begins with the First Sermon at Benares, continues throughout Buddhist history in the development of the various schools, and it goes on in the timeless now. Reality, caught in the realization of this historical Buddha, sheds its finite container at the moment of his death. This aspect of Buddhahood conceivable by us, thus, has a beginning and an end.

Sambhogakaya: When the historical Buddha passed away, the Reality that became conceivable through his personality and his teachings was no longer visible to man. But the reality which the Buddha formulated in finite concepts remained; that is to say, the spiritual content of his personality became more meaningful, since the death of the Buddha released its ties to the finite physical container.

This reality which remains — not in the historical Buddha, for he is no more, and not in its absolute aspect, for beyond comprehension — is Amida Buddha.

It is impossible to realize Dharmakaya, for it is inconceivable; it is meaningless to seek refuge in the Nirmanakaya, for he is no more — but the heart of Nirmanakaya which is Dharmakaya lives in the timeless now as Sambhogakaya, Amida Buddha. The three aspects of reality has a beginning but to review the highest formulation in the personality of Amida Buddha has no end. But the three aspects denote a single reality, so we may say Amida contains the Trikaya.

B. Please explain Dharmakara Bodhisattva (Hozo Bosatsu); when and where was he born, some of his history?

When we speak of the Three Aspects of Buddhahood (Trikaya) in terms of a beginning and an end, the relationship is thus:

1. Absolute Dharmakaya: without beginning and without end
2. Spiritual Sambhogakaya: with beginning but without end
3. Historical Nirmanakaya; with beginning and with end

The absolute is inconceivable; therefore, it is described as having neither beginning nor end. The historical world is part of our everyday experience, and we understand life in this world as having a beginning (birth) and an end (death). The two correspond to Dharmakaya and Nirmanakaya, Sakyamuni Buddha. Amida Buddha, the spiritual Sambhogakaya, is described as having a “beginning” is Dharmakaya Bodhisattva, and the fact that it is “without end” refers to Amida as immeasurable light and immeasurable life.

We are limited being. We can see only so far under certain conditions, live only until a certain age, and cannot fly or live underwater. In thought we also have only a limited range of understanding, also. We think in terms of certain established concepts or categories; “birth” (beginning) and “death” (end) are such concepts. Although there is no birth and no death from standpoint of higher truth, it is impossible for man to think without those terms; therefore, we apply them to certain changes in life. Time (when?) and space (where?) are other concepts which aid man to understand the world about us, although in actuality there is no time and no space in the static way in which we conceive them.

To understand Suchness it is necessary to first understand it through the such concepts of beginning, end, time and space. Thus, the truth of Suchness is taught by historical Sakyamuni Buddha, who was born in Lumbini Garden and who died in Kusinagara. But timeless truth did not “die” as did the historical Sakyamuni; that is to say, Suchness which he realized did not “die”, only the physical body died. The essential spirit of Sakyamuni, Suchness, lives on; it is endless, although it had a “beginning” in the sense that it was made conceivable for man by Sakyamuni Buddha.

The essential spirit, Suchness, which lives on is Amida Buddha. To make this truth understandable for us, Amida Buddha is described in terms of concepts that we understands: “beginning”, “time”, “space”, etc. And so we say that Amida Buddha was previously Dharmakara Bodhisattva and he meditated for five long kalpas, practiced for innumerable aeons of time, and finally became Amida Buddha. The absolute is explained in terms of human experience so that we can appreciate this truth. The life story of Amida Buddha, beginning with the time when he was Bodhisattve Dharmakara, is the concretion of absolute reality. It “happened” in a realm totally different from ours, but is explained as if it took place in the realm of birth and death that we know.

The “history” of Bodhisattva Dharmakara, therefore, is not to be understood in terms of facts and events. History as facts and events are localized experience which lack universal meaning. The “history” of Bodhisattva Dharmakara, when and where he was born, cannot be explained in terms of facts and events localized in time and space, for then it would have no universal, spiritual significance. It is to be understood as being symbolic of a higher universal truth; it is a “history” which occurs in all time and space. Only the faith that gives wisdom, can impart this understanding.

What is the Buddhist definition of God?

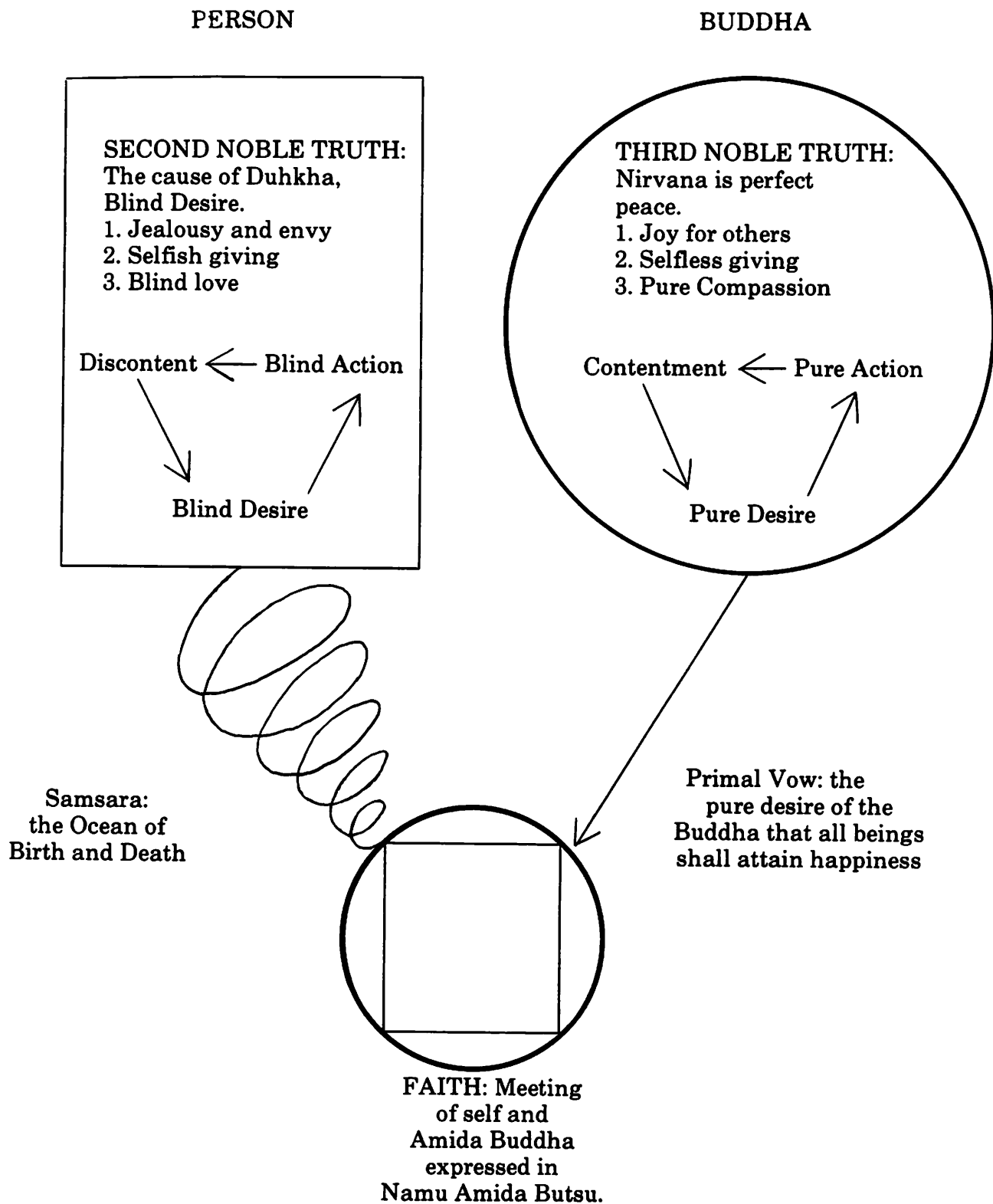
The term “God” is not ordinarily used in Buddhism. It can be used, however, if “God” means the reality of Suchness. We are part of Suchness, and when we realize this truth, we become Suchness. That is to say, we become a Buddha; we become a “God”. “God” may be used in this sense and this sense only.

If “God” is used to refer to a creator of the universe, or a being which stands outside of man and the world, or a power which judges the acts of person, such a “God” is denied in Buddhism.

Is Sakyamuni ever regarded as devine or mystic?

No. Sakyamuni is neither divine nor mystic in the sense that he possessed some supernatural powers. He attained understanding of the working of the universal through Right Effort, and he taught us the truth of his realization which is to live in harmony with the natural order inherent in life. Some people in later ages may have rever him as “divine”, but he himself never made any such claim. Sakyamuni was bit a “mystic” in its ordinary, vulgar usage; if “mystic” is used in its higher sense, meaning “one who has attained direct perception of truth” then Sakyamuni may be called a “mystic”. However, since this usage is not commonly understood, the appellation, mystic, is denied to avoid any misunderstanding.

V. FAITH (Shinjin)



What does Namu Amida Butsu really mean?

“Namu Amida Butsu” means “My heart is one with the heart of the Buddha”, and the levels of understanding this utterance may be described as:

1. As an expression of sincere which to understand the teaching, realize Suchness, and thereby awaken to the purpose of life. The effort is made to cultivate appreciation for the opening lines of the Three Treasures:

“Hard is it to be born into human life. Now we are living it. Difficult is it to hear the Teachings of the Blessed One. Now we hear it . . .”

2. The guiding light, which is Amida Buddha, illuminating the darkness of our hearts and of our world. There is no Amida Buddha existing anywhere aside from the name, “Namu Amida Butsu”. In sorrow and in joy we recite the Name for that is where Suchness comes alive.

3. As an expression of deep gratitude for the enlightenment which is assured us through the wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha. Within our hearts there is only ignorance and darkness, but wisdom and compassion embrace us though we cannot see with our own eyes, we are able to understand through insight given us by virtue of Namu Amida Butsu. This realization of salvation awakens a profound gratefulness in our hearts, and because words are inadequate to express our deepest gratitude, we say “Namu Amida Butsu”, the supreme word, to express our feeling.

Shan-tao, the Fifth Patriarch of Shin Buddhism, explained the name, as follows:

“Namu” is the reliance on the part of the faithful follower. “Namu” is also the calling of Amida to man; it is saying come as you are. “Amida Buddha” gives us all his merits, so that his accumulated practice is transferred to us to effect our ultimate enlightenment. This is “Namu Amida Butsu”.

Namu Amida Butsu is the symbol of the formless, colorless, and nameless Dharmakaya. We cannot understand Dharmakaya, but we can see the words, Namu Amida Butsu, and recite the name, Namu Amida Butsu. The inconceivable Dharmakaya is made conceivable through “Namu Amida Butsu” which can be repeated by even the child and the unlettered.

Dharmakara Bodhisattva, through kalpas of meditation and eons of practice, worked to make the inconceivable Dharmakaya conceivable for us. When he finished his work to make the unknowable knowable, he became Amida Buddha, and produced “Namu Amida Butsu” for man. Through understanding Namu Amida Butsu, we understand the truth of Suchness.

Therefore, in essence “Namu Amida Butsu” is the inconceivable truth of Suchness (Dharmakaya), its spiritual personification, Amida Buddha (Sambhogakaya), and the whole teachings of Amida Buddha (Nirmanakaya) all in one expression.

B. What does faith in Buddhism mean?

Faith in Buddhism means the union of the heart of one and the heart of Buddha; it is the union of two opposing natures: blindness and enlightenment. Shan-tao explained the contents of faith in terms of two profound realizations or beliefs:

1. To awaken to the evilness of *this* blind self, wandering from life to life, not knowing peace and the way of deliverance.
2. To awaken to the saving vows of Amida Buddhas whose pure compassion knows no bounds and is directed to the blind and evil.

These two realizations deepen simultaneously to form the content of faith, and the two continue to progressively deepen until Buddhahood is attained when we shed our physical form. Explained in the total content of general Buddhism and life experience, the two realization are, as follows:

1. The first realization: the evilness of *this* blind self. “Evilness” here refers to the blind self centeredness, the second of the Four Noble Truth: the cause of dukkha. The problem of life is brought to focus in the understanding of the cause of dukkha which is Blindness. The discontent in life is created not because of external circumstances but because of the blindness in oneself, “*this* blind self.” The result of Blind Desire, selfishness, is Blind Action, which is characterized by:

Jealousy and envy of other people’s success and happiness which is agitated from within oneself to create unhappiness and turmoil in the world.

Selfish giving which is the act performed by self-righteous people, not to help others, but to affirm one’s own position in the eyes of others.

Blind love which fails to appreciate the total human being and which, because of its restlessness, does not nurture real love but rather creates pain and unhappiness.

Blind Desire leads to Blind Action and this produces Discontent. The Discontent produces greater blindness of desire which in turn results in a more violent blindness of Action. Thus Discontent grows and the cycle of Blind Desire, Blind Action and Discontent whirls to form samsara: one lost in the ocean of birth and death, caught in the trap of his own ignorance and not knowing the path to peace and fulfillment. This is the true picture of human beings, and unless there is acknowledgement of human predicament, we fail to appreciate the compassion of Amida Buddha.

The second realization: the saving vows of Amida Buddha. Along with the first realization there is a simultaneous realization of the opposite state, enlightenment, which is expressed in the third of the Four Noble Truth: Nirvana is peace. Amida Buddha is the living compassion, calling man from the peace of nirvana. Freed from the bondage to Blind Desire, the Buddha is moved to action until all beings achieve the same state of nirvana. Amida Buddha possesses only pure desire: the wish to enlighten all beings. Amida Buddha lives in suchness, therefore, his pure desire and pure action are effective in realizing the salvation of all beings.

a. Joy for others: in Suchness there is no distinction of self and others in the conventional sense. The others are self and the self is others. Therefore, when there is occasion for joy in others, one participates in that joy as if it were one’s own. In every person’s awakening to truth, there is joy: and at the same time, there is pain and sorrow when a person fails to open his eyes to reality.

b. Selfless giving: in Suchness the giver experiences greater joy than the receiver. In selfless giving there is a reversal of ordinary situation: the giver becomes the given. There is deep joy in the ability to give without the need of asking for a return. Amida Buddha gives his whole being to us so that we shall achieve the same peace as himself. This giving is called the transference of merit.

Pure Compassion: in Suchness the wisdom of understanding the total life-situation becomes the basis for pure compassion. Compassion is deeply grounded in wisdom and devises means to achieve its pure desire through wisdom. Compassion arouses the Primal Vow and wisdom creates “Namu Amida Butsu”, so that the Vow can be fulfilled.

Faith is the awakening to the nature of *this* blind self and simultaneous awakening to the compassionate vow of Amida Buddha. The faith is deepened as we grow in the realization that the vow of Amida Buddha is for none else but *this* blind self. Ultimately, our hearts are in harmonious union with the heart of Amida.

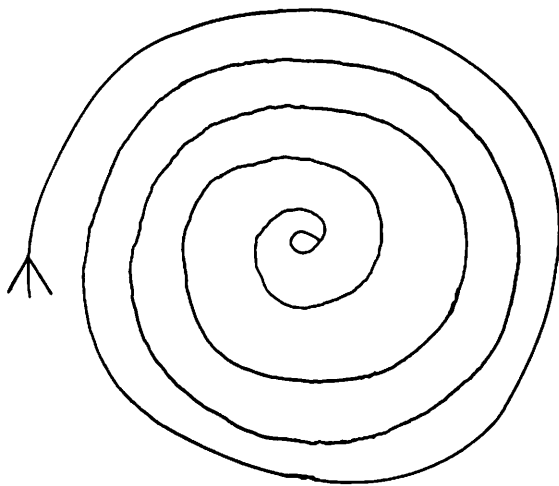
It is true that we fail to appreciate the real meaning of Shin Buddhism if we do not desire to be born in the Pure Land?

Yes, it is true. When one realizes the nature of *this* blind self, he realizes the great distance that separates him from enlightenment. This is the contrast between self and Buddha, one who lives against Suchness and one who is the living Suchness.

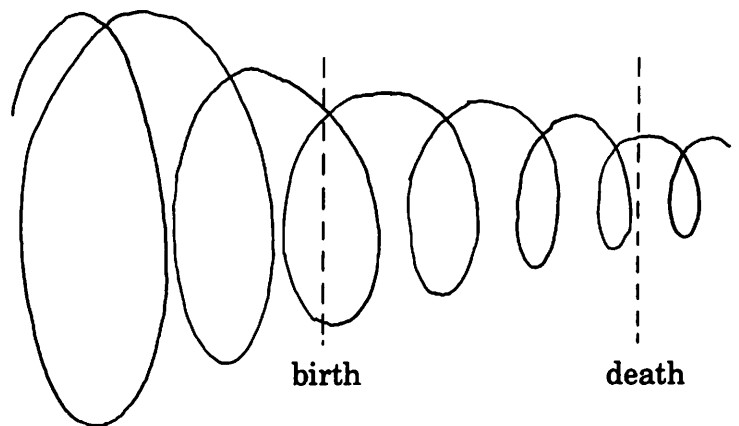
Pure Land is also suchness itself, and one seeks to become suchness completely. In order to do so, we must seek birth in the Pure Land, but as the Lure Land Masters have taught, birth here in the "birth whose essence is no-birth."

VI. KARMA

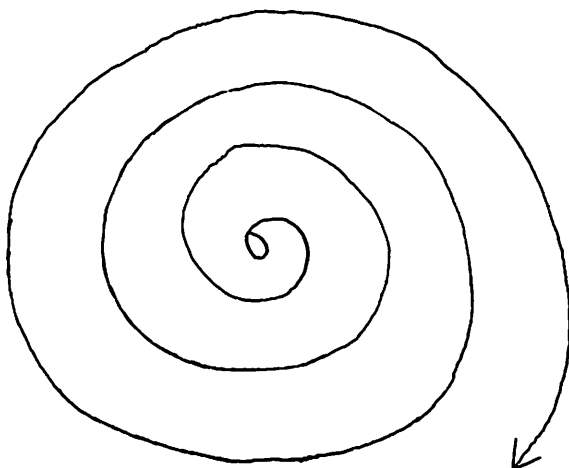
Ordinary Person: centripetal ego, living in selfishness; inward into blindness.



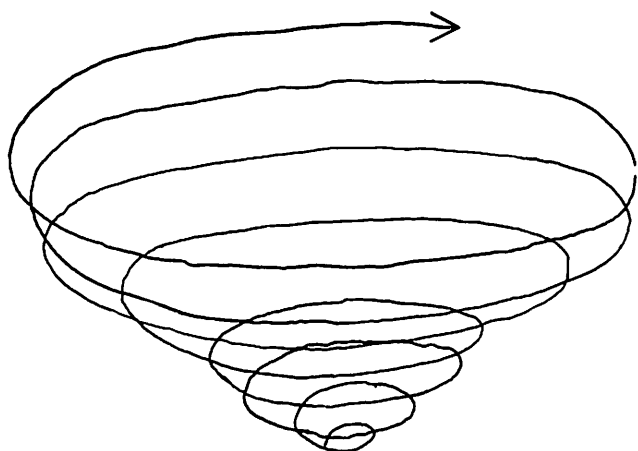
SOUL, LIFE AFTER DEATH, etc.: the continuity of blindness, and meaningless cycle of birth death, samsara.



BUDDHA: centrifugal being, acting in selflessness; outward for salvation of those in blindness.



THE PRIMAL VOW: action in enlightenment, the desire to save all people from samsara.



A. Please explain Karma.

Karma means “action”. When it is understood properly, it is the source of happiness, but when it is misunderstood, it can become the source of unhappiness. To fully appreciate the meaning of karma and dispel any misunderstanding, three points must be made clear:

1. Karma meaning “cause and effect” is *not* the Buddhist idea of karma. Karma in this sense, that to every action there is corresponding reaction, was a popular belief among pre-Buddhist people, and people of later years who failed to appreciate the Buddhist meaning of karma interpreted it in this popular way.

2. Karma as an objective universal truth was taught by the Buddha as being essentially an attitude developed on Conditional origination towards circumstances in life. In the popular belief happiness and unhappiness were determined externally by good or bad acts in the past. In Buddhism happiness and unhappiness become attitudes determined by self, freed of any external force. Therefore, it is said that the basis of karma is thought (cetana), meaning that by our thought or will we create happiness for ourselves. The past does not determine life; we create future happiness in the present. Therefore, throughout Buddhism the stress is made on the effort or will to create meaning in life.

3. Karma is developed and explained subjectively in Mahayana Buddhism. All action (karma) creates bondage and greater blindness for people who do not live Oneness, but for those who have attained insight of prajna—the enlightened, the faithful, and the person of satori—no human action is binding to become the cause of unhappiness. Human life is karma (series of action) which brings unhappiness for those who live in blindness and selfishness (centripetal ego), but that same karma is the very source of the meaning in life for those who have become freed of blindness and selfishness centrifugal ego).

B. Is the life we live laid down for us before birth, or is it due to what we do day after day?

When Buddha taught Conditional Origination, he denied three traditional ways of thinking:

1. That life is pre-determined by our past actions (fatalism).
2. That life is governed by an absolute being (determinism).
3. That life is without rhyme or reason (nihilism).

Conditional Origination was a new insight into life which taught that the circumstances in our life are due to a multiplicity of shifting conditions (life is not predetermined), but that the meaning we give to the changing circumstances is wholly dependent upon the effort we apply in working towards a better and richer life. (Life is based upon our actions from day to day.)

C. What is the idea of soul in Buddhism?

Buddhism teaches that one has no soul as a permanent substance or essence which is in one and remains after death. Such an idea of soul is the product of attachment born from Blind Ego. It goes against the reality of life. Blind attachment sets up distinction between self and others; it is a mere illusion created by one who does not live in reality. The Blind Ego has a soul (attachment), but the enlightened have no soul (non-attachment). This is not a negation of the differences between self and others; rather, it is the negation of the differences as absolute.

D. What is the Buddhist idea about life after death?

The person who lives in Blind Ego continues to wander in darkness after death, as he does in life, until he reaches enlightenment. The centripetal ego whirls into endless samsara. The person of enlightenment, pure faith, and satori, purified of blindness, becomes a Buddha after death. As a Buddha he works for the enlightenment of all beings with who he is endlessly interrelated.

E. Please explain the relationship between theory of soul, reincarnation, and rebirth.

“Soul” as a permanent entity is denied in Buddhism, because it is the product of man’s ignorance, the Blind Ego, which is against Oneness. The belief in “soul” produces in turn the ideal of life after death, and in the popular religions of India this “soul” is believed to undergo a series of “rebirth” into other forms which is called “reincarnation.”

Buddhism denies the idea of a “soul”, but the unenlightened who lives in Blind Ego holds an attachment to self and his attachment of the Blind Ego continues to wander (samsara) after physical death until enlightenment is attained. This wandering does *not* occur in the sense of rebirth or reincarnation. It is a spiritual transmigration, a meaningless wandering, applied not only to an empty life not but in timeless past and timeless future.

F. What is the Buddhist definition of sin?

Sin is the state of one who live in Blind Ego against the truth of interdependence. No matter what the act is, whether good or bad morally speaking, it is a sin if it is the act of the unenlightened.