Happy New Year!

It's hard to believe that we have placed closure to the year of 2005. And, a new year, 2006 is before us with new hopes and aspirations.

In reflecting on my term as BCA President, I can tell you it has been nothing less than an adventure! The BCA placed their trust in my leadership and I asked for change and flexibility. Much of my personal time has been away from my family and for that I want to thank my wife, Joann, and our family for their patience and support. We value our family time together and there were some missed moments. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Executive Committee. Together, we need to recognize their work and dedication. Last, and most sincerely, I value the many individuals and temples that I have worked with during these two years. It is each and every one of these relationships that made my Presidency all the more enjoyable and gratifying.

I believe that 2006 will be a turning point for the BCA. As we near closer to the completion of the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley and implement the position of interim BCA Executive Director; we can be very proud of our commitment and hard work. Some of our remaining tasks are with the Endowment Fund future and to complete our current campaign.

It is very important for me to acknowledge the value of our Endowment Fund. This fund provides the financial power to plan for our future. The Endowment has performed as well as, or even better than some of our own personal investments. By supporting the Endowment Fund, your money can grow and, at the same time, support many of the BCA Programs. As you will recall, this fund allowed us to keep our annual dues to reasonable fees. I encourage you to review your personal financial commitments for 2006 and consider a donation to the BCA Endowment Fund.

In closing, my leadership platform has been to lead the BCA with a forward thinking approach. As we near closer to the completion of the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley and implement the position of interim BCA Executive Director; we can be very proud of our commitment and hard work. Some of our remaining tasks are with the Endowment Fund future and to complete our current campaign.

The immediate thought that came to my mind is that I must become a person from whom the Nembutsu flows regardless of time or place. Our recitation of the Nembutsu in front of the Buddha or before meals is important, but in the Nembutsu that emerges without ceremonial formality, our Nembutsu flows regardless of time or place. Our recitation of the Nembutsu in front of the Buddha or before meals is important, but in the Nembutsu that emerges without ceremonial formality, we also experience gratitude for being keenly reminded of Amida Buddha. Through this type of recitation, reflection on the Nembutsu guides us to accept our current situation, and joy and courage also arises within us.

When we look upon the history of Jodo Shinshu, we come to understand that, in many cases, Nembutsu followers settled in new areas first and the ministers began their propogational work afterwards. In considering today’s population distribution, I imagine that Nembutsu followers can be found throughout the world as well as Japan. It would be ideal if everyone everywhere could have a place where the teaching of the Nembutsu could be heard and discussed with friends, regardless of whether or not a temple is nearby. To that end, we must create a way to maintain such close connections.

Let us spend the coming year in using our ingenuity to map out our various visions.

Ohanai Koshin
Monshu
Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha

Happy New Year an exciting one, filled with meaningful growth and potential.

As Socho, Bishop of the Buddhist Churches of America, my motto is, “Anchu ni mosaku sawo koto wo ikigai to shi, shikou sakugo wo osorezu,” which means, challenge one’s life to seek in the midst of uncertainty, and do not be afraid to try new things out or make mistakes.

The law of impermanence is the most essential understanding of the Buddha Dharma. This means things are moving, constantly changing, and going forward, and we must go along with it. I believe there is no progress in life without change. My vision is to make Jodo Shinshu, Shin Buddhism, a major religious tradition in America.

To realize my vision, I summarize the following four points:

1. There is no doubt that the reinterpretation of the teaching of the Nembutsu (of Jodo Shinshu) is key to the future of Jodo Shinshu in America and in the world. If the Dharma is truly universal truth, it should make sense to anyone, anyplace, at anytime.

2. Through the understanding and appreciation of the Buddha Dharma, and through the realization of the truth of the Nembutsu, we have to go beyond and break through the walls and boundaries of ethnicity to reach all people, regardless of race.

3. The ministers, lay leaders, and the temples have to become more involved in community events, and in particular take the initiative to be a part of interfaith and inter-religious activities.

4. It is my hope that all ministers, lay leaders, and temples will try to nurture, train, and develop one kaikyoshi ministerial candidate from their local level through the Minister’s Assistant Program. Also, all members of the sangha should make an effort to bring one new member from among one’s circle of family, relatives and friends.

If we can begin to live such a vision, within three years we should see a great and positive transformation of the BCA.

These are my thoughts. Let us make this New Year an exciting one, filled with meaningful growth and potential.

Gassho,
Koshin Ogui, Socho
Bishop
Buddhist Churches of America
San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin Fetes Retiring Rinban Ohata

Rinban and Mrs. Masanori Ohata were honored upon his retirement as Rinban of the San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin. There was a special retirement service on Dec. 4, followed by a festive dinner at the Wyndham Hotel. Over 330 were in attendance.

Special guests were Socho Koshin Ogui, BCA Bishop and his wife and the Ohata family: Dr. and Mrs. Mit-suaki Ohata and Alesa and Mika and Tae Shin and Brian and Mika. Many ministers were in attendance as well as representatives from Stockton, Ogden, Utah, and Redley and from many organizations and institutions. Dinner sponsors were Joyce, Adele and Alexis Iwaski, in memory of Ed Iwaski; Ed Morimoto and Tom Yuki.

Speeches given by Socho Ogui, Rev. Gerald Sakamoto, Rev. Dr. Seigen Yamaoka, Rev. David Matsuo, Doug Iwamoto, BCA President, and Bob Idemoto, Betsuin president were deemed by attendees as humorous and heartwarming. Masters of Ceremonies were the Betsuin presidents who had served during Rinban Ohata’s term. They were Dr. Kenji Akahoshi, Joyce Iwaski, Michael Jones, Steve Ichinaga and Bob Idemoto. Many commendations were received from elected officials of the United States, California, county and city.

San Jose Taiko performed to open the dinner and the drums were used to march Rinban and Mrs. Ohata into a standing ovation. Other entertaining elements were a video of past activities, including the first farewell event, the Arigato Day of golf, bowling and barbecue. After gifts were presented, Rinban Ohata responded with a speech of appreciation. The evening concluded with a song and slide show of “What a Wonderful Life,” Mrs. Ohata’s favorite song. Vocalist was Sumi Tanabe, accompanied by Mas Nishimura with media arranged by Mas Horuchi and Bob Terasaki.

Chair of the Retirement Dinner Committee was Reiko Iwakuma. The committee was comprised of Karen Akahoshi, Cindy Iwamura, Joyce Iwaski, Jeanne Nakanoh, Terry Oshidari, Marlene Terasaki, and Phyllis Yoshikawa. Advisors were Sumi Tanabe, Bob Idemoto and Rev. Gerald Sakamoto.

Elected Officials Congratulate Rinban Ohata’s Accomplishments

By Joyce Iwaski

Rinban Ohata’s nine years of dedicated service to the San Jose Betsuin Sangha and to the larger community were acknowledged by local elected officials at the Dec. 4 retirement dinner.

Attending the reception were U.S. Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren, and San Jose Council Member Forrest Williams. County of Santa Clara Supervisor Pete McHugh, presented a congratulatory proclamation to Rinban Ohata during dinner.

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren on Dec. 6, entered an entire proclamation of Rinban Ohata’s BCA achievements in the Congressional Record as part of the U.S. House of Representatives daily business in Washington, DC. The following is an excerpt from that document:

“Rinban Ohata’s contributions to the community are clearly demonstrated in his compassion and understanding. An immigrant himself, Reverend Ohata is a strong believer in the unifying powers of diversity, faith, tolerance and understanding. He has shared this strength through roles within the community. The San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin sits in the heart of my district and opens its door to people of every ethnicity, faith, nationality, culture and community. Yearly Obon festivals bring hundreds of people into the halls of the Buddhist church for good food and increased understanding among San Jose’s extremely diverse communities of neighbors and friends.

Although Reverend Ohata is formally retiring, I am certain that his legacy will continue throughout the sidewalks of San Jose’s Japantown and within the vibrant and diverse communities he touched. Congressman Mike Honda sent along a congratulatory message to Rinban and Mrs. Ohata. The following is an excerpt from that message:

Both Reverend and his wife have been wonderful leaders for the Buddhist community of San Jose for the last nine years. Reverend Ohata’s help in guiding the San Jose Betsuin has been of great value to the 1,200 Jodo Shinshu Buddhists in the San Jose area. Mrs. Ohata’s loving support of her husband and contributions to the Buddhist community have played an integral role in the growth of the community.

I am pleased to congratulate Reverend and Mrs. Masanori Ohata for over four decades of dedicated service to Buddhist temples across the country. I extend my best wishes as they begin their retirement.

Commendations, certificates and letters of congratulations were presented to Rinban during dinner from the following:

- Mike Honda, U.S. House of Representatives, 15th Congressional District
- Zoe Lofgren, U.S. House of Representatives, 16th Congressional District
- Senator Elaine Alquist, 13th Senatorial District
- Assemblywoman Rebecca Cohn, 24th Assembly District
- Liz Kniss, Chair and District 5 Representative
- Santa Clara County Supervisor Pete McCugh, District 3
- San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales
- San Jose Vice Mayor and District 3 Representative Cindy Chavez
- San Jose District 2 Councilmember Forrest Williams.

San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin BCA Archives Historic Preservation Committee

Arthur Nishimura from Daly City, Calif. and Fumiko Uyeda Groves of Seattle, were selected to attend the Archives Training Workshop on Dec. 21-22, conducted at the Japanese American National Museum and Los Angeles Betsuin.

Jazz at the San Mateo Buddhist Temple

This past September, in an effort to attract the public to our temple, a jazz concert was held at the San Mateo Buddhist Temple. About 50 people attended this unique event.

Opie Bellas, the J-Town Jazz Ensemble and the San Mateo Taiko performed at the Jazz at the Temple concert. The San Mateo Taiko started the evening off with some spirited drumming, then the J-Town Jazz Ensemble, a 16-piece dance band, played old hits and danceable oldies in the style of the Glen Miller orchestra. Opie Bellas captivated the crowd with her cabaret-style interpretations of jazz standards.

Rev. Sasaki Officiates Memorial for Pat Morita

Speakers at the private memorial service in Las Vegas included family members and long time friends, from showbiz pals to Rev. LaVerne Senyo Sasaki, a retired Buddhist minister from Northern California. He met Morita more than 50 years ago, after both had released from World War II internment camps.

Before sharing his recollections, Sasaki chanted a brief Buddhist service and presented Morita with his Buddhist name, which he translated as "Play in the World of Wisdom."

Rev. George Matsubayashi, Rinban of the Los Angeles Betsuin conducted a community memorial service on Dec. 14 at the Aratani/Japan America Theatre in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles.

Additional reports by Carol Cling (Las Vegas Review-Journal)
2006 BCA Ministers’ Association General Meeting Feb. 22-23

BCA National Council Feb. 24-26, Double Tree Hotel, Sacramento, CA.

BCA National Board Meeting Held

The BCA National Board met on Dec. 10 at the BCA Headquarters in San Francisco. The meeting began with a special service held in the hondo of the Buddhist Church of San Francisco. Governor Ryaji Kuwaba from the Hongwaji read a message from the Go-Monshu on the upcoming 750th memorial for Shiran Shonin in 2012. In observing this memorial, the Go-Monshu has proclaimed 2005 as the start of a 12-year-long range development project where the Hongwaji hopes to propagate the Jodo Shinshu teachings worldwide. Critical to this plan are the efforts of the BCA in making materials available in English, utilizing different types of media.

BCA President Douglas Iwamoto reminded the Board members that current privacy laws prohibit temples from announcing the medical condition of a minister or temple member in temple newsletter. Indicating that someone is recovering from an illness is acceptable; publicizing their diagnosis is not. President Iwamoto also introduced the position of the BCA Executive Director. The Executive Director would supervise the BCA employees who work at headquarters and at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley who are not part of Socho’s staff. The Executive Director would oversee the day-to-day management of the BCA. Having an Executive Director would allow the BCA to make administrative and financial decisions in a timely manner.

The National Board approved creating the Executive Director’s position and agreed to study its usefulness during the following year. Henry Shibata is the interim executive director.

Socho Oguri announced that Rev. Shobo Ohata of the San Jose Betsuin would retire from the BCA on Dec. 31. Rev. Kenshin Fujimoto was appointed Rinban of the San Jose Betsuin effective Jan. 15, 2006. Rev. Koken Torimi of Los Angeles Betsuin announced his intention to resign from the BCA and return to his home temple in Japan. Rev. Dr. Hoshu Matsubayashi was appointed Rinban of the Seattle Betsuin effective Jan. 20, 2006.

Socho Oguri presented the Guidelines for covering Ministers’ Moving Expenses. The National Board approved the guidelines and agreed to create a Minister’s Moving Expense Fund to assist ministers who get assigned to a temple.

Rev. Kengu Kobata reminded temples to send in their temple and community photos to be displayed at BCA Headquarters and the Jodo Shinshu Center. He urged ministers to utilize the notification forms to maintain lines of communications with the Office of the Bishop. He also asked ministers to inform BCA Headquarters if a BCA group plans to visit the Hongwaji.

Rev. Kango Sakamoto reported that the BCA Ministers’ Association established a BCA Ministers’ Legal Assistance Fund to help pay for immigration costs for ministers coming from Japan.

The National Board voted on the new officers of the BCA for 2006-2007. The President-Elect will be Dr. Billy Saeeki (Venice). The Vice-Presidents will be Sumi Tanabe (San Jose) and Jeff Suda (Oakland). The Secretary will be Mary Ann Miyao (Sacramento). The Treasurer will be Everett Watada (Denver). The Continued on Page 9
Seabrook Buddhist Temple Celebrates 60th Anniversary, Announces Publication of Book

By Frances Tazumi

With the first and second generation of Japanese Americans who founded the temple, Rev. Takashi Nakayama, husband of Shin Buddhist Church and Ekoji Buddhist Temple on Nov. 13, attended the 60th Anniversary of the Seabrook Buddhist Temple. Rev. Naoki Kono, resident minister, officiated the commemorative service. Rev. Ronald Kobata, executive assistant to the Bishop, attended as guest speaker for the Ogui Socho who was unable to attend.

Our first Sansei President of the Temple, Susan Nakayama Jacques gave the history of the Temple.

Twenty-one ministers who provided religious and educational support for our members during this period were all acknowledged. She also thanked the efforts of all past and present members for their support and their dedication to continue the Buddha-Dharma here at Seabrook.

Commemorative pictures were taken and delicious boxed lunches were prepared by our Women’s Association. Erick Ishii, president of the Eastern District Organization of American Buddhists of Churches of America will also use this occasion of the 60th anniversary and the Council of the BCA, extended congratulations also to all past and present members for their support and acknowledgment. She wished to share the dynamic messages of Rev. Akahoshi given to the Seabrook membership was shown at the luncheon. He has recently moved into an assisted living quarters in Kyoto, Japan. He states his long life is made possible by the help and caring of many people. He extends “to all the temple members and friends: continued good health and that we continue to devote ourselves to the Buddhist path.”

The first venture for the Education Committee, here in Seabrook, spearheaded by the new recommendations from Bishop Ogui, was successfully brought to fulfillment. We thank the untiring efforts of Leon Warner and Linda Engstrom, assisted by Rev. Kono. We look forward to more learning experiences.

Gov. Kuwaba’s Message to the BCA National Board of Directors

Photo at right: Socho Ogui receiving the Gomonshu’s message from Governor Ryuis Kuwaba.

The following is an excerpt of Honwgan Governor Ryuis Kuwaba’s message to the BCA National Board of Directors on Dec. 10.

We who revere Shinran Shonin as our own spiritual father take upon ourselves an attitude of learning about his life, facing up to the various problems at hand, and hearing the Dharma and propagating the teaching in order to respond to people’s anxieties and pain. In order to do this, it is necessary to institute appropriate propagation methods that will make the Jodo Shinshu teaching easy to understand and remember, and to reexamine our organizational framework so that it meets the needs of the twenty-first century and the world.

Together with maintaining our organizational framework, our future depends on our strong commitment and emphasis on nurturing persons that possess a burning desire to propagate the Nembutsu teaching.

I have explained the general outline of the Hongwgan’s Long-range Development Project, with an emphasis on the promotion of overseas propagation. Let us hold high the torch of the Nembutsu in the twenty-first century and strive to promote the various projects our organization is undertaking. I hope that the ministers and members of the Buddhist Churches of America will also use this opportunity as a “fresh start” to work towards the betterment of our institution as a whole, and to widely spread the harmony and peace of the Nembutsu. In closing, I kindly ask for your understanding and continued support.

Thank you very much for your attention.

As the Wheel Turns

Happy Wholly New Year!

In the process of assembling the contents for the January 2006 edition of the Wheel of Dharma, beginning with Gomonshu Koshin Ohhtani, Socho Koshin Ogui, and President Doug Iwamoto’s New Year’s greetings, it occurred to me that we didn’t have any references to this year’s BCA theme, “Live a Life of Awakening”. The Japanese version is “Tomo ni ayoumu Mezame no jinsei.” The Ministers Association selected this theme based upon Rev. Dr. Takamuro Shigaraki’s book recently translated into English by Rev. David Matsumoto under the title, “A Life of Awakening: The Heart of the Shin Buddhist Path.”

Dr. Shigaraki clarifies, “shinjiru is the experience of awakening, in which I actually realize that there is no Amida Buddha apart from me; I realize that I am constantly living the life of Amida Buddha, together with Amida Buddha... In Shinran’s thought, shinjiru means that our own hearts and minds—our own personal subjectivity and our own lives—cast of their old skin and grow anew.”

As we cast off the old year and begin a new turn of the Wheel, I invite all readers to share your experiences or expressions of awakening that will reflect the variety and vitality of our Shin Buddhist sangha in America.
Helen Tsuchiya loved the Japanese-style stone lantern that a friend’s husband had made for her. It was rigged with electric lights and brought a pleasant glow each evening to her front yard of her St. Louis Park home. Then one night it disappeared. She was so upset that she posted a sign in her front yard; “Whoever stole my stone lantern, I hope you’re sleeping well, because I’m not.”

All this happened nearly a decade ago. Over the years, she had put the incident out of her mind. But apparently, the thief could not.

On the morning of September 28, Tsuchiya opened her drapes and looked out her front window, and there it was: The stone lantern. Inside was a note, unsigned, yet bearing an angered soul: “I stole this from this house many years ago. I was young and stupid and very irresponsible. I thought it was lost a long time ago, but recently found it, and it belongs to its rightful owner, I am very sorry… Best Wishes.”

Tsuchiya now 80, was so moved by this act of redemption that she wanted everyone to know about it. “How wonderful for this young man to return it and apologize for his past action,” she wrote us. “I would very much like to meet him and personally forgive him, and at the same time congratulate him for turning his life around.”

He really made my day, and I want to wish him all the success in his future.” Tsuchiya says she’s had a hard time relating the incident to anyone without getting emotional. The lantern was special to her because it was made by a builder whom she had helped with a project… In appreciation, “He made me that lantern; I have never seen another lantern like that anywhere.” “It was the talk of the neighborhood,” she recalls, and when it disappeared, “all my neighbors don’t looking around but to no avail.”

In the days after the lamp was stolen, she recalls, “I was angry for the loss.” She tried to find a replacement, yet baring an anguished note she wrote us. “I would very much like to replace it for the wonderful culture of America. There is not a custom like “Otoshi-dama” to their children, their relatives’ children, and even to neighborhood children in some cases. I think that everyone would like to escape from this situation. But I am now in Americ. There is not a custom like “Ootshi-dama” in America. Now I am very glad for the wonderful culture of America. By the way, do you know what a car navigation system is? This is one of the latest machines we can get in our cars that guide us to a destination. The screen displays the map in detail and clearly shows us where we are at that moment. My brother has this navigation system in Japan. When I went back to Japan, I had a chance to drive his car that has this car navigation system. It was amazing and very useful. When you are using such a car navigation system, it can be very dangerous to be driving while looking at the map display. And because it is dangerous, this machine talks to us! When we approach the intersection where we must turn, it will say, “Please turn right at the next intersection.” It speaks out loud and tells us which direction to turn. It also calculates the distance to the destination and even shows us our estimated arrival time. It is very useful. Even when we go to places we don’t know at all, we always arrive successfully, because this navigation system guides us well. Because of this, it seems that many people are getting these navigation systems. I also want to get one, but since it is still costly, it is very expensive. It’s wonderful to have such help that keeps us from getting lost. If only we could have such help in living life. If you were asked, “Where are you headed in your life?” How would you answer? I think that there are not many people who could answer such a question quickly and clearly. Yet in living life it is very important to know where we are trying to go; and sometimes we might not even know that we are lost. Shin Buddhism teaches us to “Live with the Pure Land as our destination.”

It speaks out loud and tells us which direction to turn. It also calculates the distance to the destination and even shows us our estimated arrival time. It is very useful. Even when we go to places we don’t know at all, we always arrive successfully, because this navigation system guides us well. Because of this, it seems that many people are getting these navigation systems. I also want to get one, but since it is still costly, it is very expensive. It’s wonderful to have such help that keeps us from getting lost. If only we could have such help in living life. If you were asked, “Where are you headed in your life?” How would you answer? I think that there are not many people who could answer such a question quickly and clearly. Yet in living life it is very important to know where we are trying to go; and sometimes we might not even know that we are lost. Shin Buddhism teaches us to “Live with the Pure Land as our destination.”

And it shows us clearly the direction to the Pure Land. The Pure Land is not far away. If we open our Dharma-eyes, we can see that the Pure Land, which is Amida Buddha, is “here and now.” If we could see the world with Enlightened Eyes, we would see a world pure world without affliction; a world that exceeds love and hatred; a world where ALL life shines, for all life is revealed to be a precious thing. Living without true awareness, we live selfishly, just consuming that which we want, excluding those things from our lives that are inconvenient; we hurt others and may hurt even ourselves. When we live with an awareness of the Pure Land, we, of course, continue live our lives here in this physical world, yet we begin to see clearly that it is difficult, if not impossible, to relinquish our minds of our self-centered egotism. When we feel the true world called the Pure Land, we can begin to see our own lies and falsehoods. In other words, a person who truly sees his ego-nature, we are nurtured to enter the true world where the ego-nature is revealed to be of no substance and no consequence. Although I sincerely want to live with my mind and heart in the Pure Land, I always find I continue to live in the darkness of self-centered passion… and I lose sight of the way. When this happens, what should I do, and who should I trust? Shinran Shonin taught us that, “The one who knows and understands our human predicament – the one who encourages us to find our direction in life – is Amida Buddha.” Amida Buddha is always guiding us to the true world by calling to us with the Nembutsu. Therefore, living with the Nembutsu, we begin to find our direction in life – is Amida Buddha.”

While hailing the New Year, let us set a direction where we live in the darkness of self-centered passion… and we lose sight of the way. When this happens, what should I do, and who should I trust? Shinran Shonin taught us that, “The one who knows and understands our human predicament – the one who encourages us to find our direction in life – is Amida Buddha.” Amida Buddha is always guiding us to the true world by calling to us with the Nembutsu. Therefore, living with the Nembutsu, we begin to find our direction in life – is Amida Buddha.”

In Gasho
Yushi Taisaki Mukojima
The Buddhist Temple of San Diego
Jodo Shinshu means literally True Pure Land Sect, a monotheistic religion of Japan that is referred to this religious sect as Shin Buddhism, and somehow this latter name is now in general use, although Shin Buddhism simply means True Buddhism. It seems the more specific name with reference to Jodo Shinshu is preferable, because it points to the central concept upon which our sect is based and not to a misleading assumption that only our sect adheres to the true teaching of the Buddha. Jodo Shinshu in the Pure Land, there are many paths to the summit of truth, and the way we choose to follow depends on our specific capabilities or circumstances.

Since the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) is increasingly concerned that its membership as well as the interest in its teachings is steadily declining, perhaps the first question that our way the doctrine is being presented may be causing some confusion in the minds of our members? From our teachers of the Dharma, we hear over and over again that we need only to have pure faith in Amida, and we will be born in Pure Land, where we will attain perfect Enlightenment. This teaching is detached from the life around us -- the social, political, and intellectual currents of our changing world. Perhaps it is time for Jodo Shinshu to expand its horizon and relate its teaching to what is happening in the present world. So much needs our attention and participation!

It is now generally accepted among our Jodo Shinshu clergy that the story of Dharakara, who became Amida Buddha, is a myth embodying a Supreme Being who can liberate us simply by the recitation of the Nembutsu. Even Einstein, after reading through many books in his youth, began to question the story of God as told in the Bible, although he had never lost faith in some kind of a spiritual principle underlying the physical world. How is the BCA going to adapt our sectarian teaching of Jodo Shinshu to the needs of the young and the intellectually advanced people of this 21st Century?

During the middle period of the past century, our ministers carefully explained that the historical Buddha is a noble sermon, although the actual meaning of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teaching of enlightenment was becoming faint. Yet, out of a genuine and profound gratitude to the Compassionate One, the Issei contributed much of their hard-earned incomes to building temples and supporting the missionary activities of their respective ministers in hopes of assuring the continued spiritual guidance of their children and future generations. As a result, the BCA became the largest Buddhist organization in North America, because it provided a comfortable social environment for the immigrants and descendants in a climate of fierce anti-Japanese sentiment.

We have now entered the 21st Century and the year 2005, which is being celebrated as the World Year of Physics in recognition of Albert Einstein’s great contribution to our knowledge of the physical world, which overturned the long-established views of space, matter, and energy. Human knowledge has extended beyond unimaginable distances, calculated in terms of light years, to other planets within the Milky Way galaxy that contains hundreds of billions of stars. Light year is approximately equal to 5.878 trillion miles, and the diameters of galaxies range from 1,500 to 300,000 light years. These figures are given to show that the Earth is, in fact, a mere speck in the vastness of the universe. We also know much more of the miniature world of atoms and microbes, as well as about the double-helix structure in a molecule that stores genetic information. Our youth and young adults have absorbed this knowledge, and are no longer interested in the stories of Dharmakara and Amida.

The selfish, uncaring actions of intellectually advanced people of this 21st Century, this assurance of the Buddha who would escort them out of the fear of death and suffering, he taught the idea of a Compassionate Being who would escort them to a wonderful paradise only if they recited his name, or Namu Amida Butsu, in sincere faith. This doctrinal method is similar to the parable of the burning house found in the Lotus Sutra in which three types of desirable chariots are offered to a father to his children to entice them out of the burning house, so they can then be rewarded with being a truly magnificent chariot, a metaphor for Enlightenment.

In the Larger Sutra, one of the three basic sutras of Jodo Shinshu, the historical Buddha states that he skillfully provides a variety of expedient means to guide people gradually to the truth of life, because they cannot immediately accept the fact that all things are impermanent and changing. It seems that the time is ripe to put forth again an earnest effort to explain the final objective of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teaching: that is, a complete liberation from attachment to, or desires for, things and conditions that are impermanent in their nature.

Life has been in this Scientific Age as a combination of certain chemical compounds that has been evolving from simpler to more complex forms, into an incredible variety of forms and sizes. As organisms must respond to their environmental conditions, they began to establish close symbiotic relationships with each other for their mutual benefit. The relationship may be between a plant and an animal, or between two animals, or between birds and animals. There is also a complicated relationship known as food chains, which human beings can upset by disturbing this structural linkage by a variety of destructive actions, such as by hunting, by deforesting, by polluting the rivers, and by whatever else that may upset the ecological balance. In addition, we are causing global warming by releasing huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from combustion of fossil fuels, as oil or coal. The ozone layer in the atmosphere is disintegrating and destroying the Earth’s protective shield, while glaciers are beginning to melt, raising the sea level and putting coastal cities at risk.

The selfish, uncaring actions of intellectually advanced people of this small planet can cause disastrous climatic changes and threaten billions of other lives. Instead of fighting and killing for exploitation and territorial control, imagine what wonders we can achieve by a cooperative effort to apply our ever expanding knowledge and technical know-how to create a peaceful, healthy, and joyful life throughout the world!

Pure Land is thus attainable as part of our everyday life, not a place to enter only after death. The way to O-Jodo, however, starts simply by taking creative measures to build a harmonious environment within our own homes, expanding to our individual temples, and eventually to our surrounding communities.

Gaxhoo, Kimi Yoneuma Hisatsune

Jodo Shinshu in the 21st Century

“How is the BCA going to adapt our sectarian teaching of Jodo to meet the needs of the young and the intellectually advanced people of this 21st Century?”

PAGE 6 WHEEL OF DHARMA JANUARY 2006

Mrs. Kimi Hisatsune

All proceeds benefit Bay District Jr. YBA
Row, Row, Row Your Boat…

Rev. Bob Oshita, Rinban Sacramento Betsuin

“Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream; merrily, merrily, merrily; life is but a dream…. Namo Amida Butsu…”

In August of 2005, when I was meeting with our Bishop, Socho Ogui in San Francisco, he was singing this song. It was just the two of us in his office and he said, “What’s the name of that song?” I laughed and said, “Row, Row, Row Your Boat!” He laughed and nodded his head, immediately getting the obvious. He said, “This is a very beautiful song. It has such a Buddhist feeling to it.” I explained to him that here in America, most of us have grown up with this song from childhood and never really give it much thought. He asked me, “What do you think if I use this for the “Opening Meditation” at the Southern District Family Conference?” I laughed again and told him that if he doesn’t I will. No one else really knew of his plans.

At the beginning of September, over 900 people gathered at the Anaheim Hilton for this first ever Southern District Family Conference hosted by the Orange County Buddhist Temple. At the opening service, after the usual opening remarks and welcome messages, Socho Ogui led over 20 ministers in a sutra chanting. Then the service chairman called upon the Bishop of BCA, Socho Koshin Ogui for his Dharma Message. Socho walked up to the podium and said, “I know all of us who enjoyed the Opening Meditation and it became the wonderful meditation. It is, as I wish to remember this lesson and next try to remember this lesson and next time my wife, Patti, directs her constructive comments my way, I shall respond, “Patti, row your own boat!” Although we may try, ultimately we cannot row any one else’s boat; Just the boat of OUR lives. No one will row it for us; Just us rowing. We are simply rowing our boat. The boat of our lives; Happily in the Moment that is NOW. No other time to think about; No other place to be; No one else but me…rowing the boat of my life. And we each must row our own boat. No one will row it for us; Just as each of us must be responsible for the Karma of our lives. No one else. At the Orange County Southern District Family Conference, people really picked up on Socho’s wonderful meditation and it became the unexpected theme of that gathering. I spoke three times on Saturday day…and opened and closed each talk with this delightful meditation. In this simple song, there is so much Buddhist imagery. Every phrase is loaded. Think about this: We can only row OUR own boat. We cannot row someone else’s, however often we may try. I reacquainted with a couple that I had not seen in over 25 years, Yas and Nancy Gohata. I had met them when I was at the LA Betsuin 30 years ago.

Before the closing service on Sunday morning, we talked about this wonderful song. Nancy said, “I was just telling Yas this morning that he shouldn’t complain or be so critical of others. So I told him, “Yas, row your own boat. Don’t try to row everyone else’s boat too.”

Isn’t that great! Each and every-one of us - we all complain and criticize others. And each time we do, whether it’s as an armchair quar- terback and couch-potato coach on Sunday…or when we monku while we’re stuck in traffic…what are we doing? Each time we complain, we are trying to row someone else’s boat. I’ll try to remember this lesson and next time my wife, Patti, directs her constructive comments my way, I shall respond, “Patti, row your own boat!” Although we may try, ultimately we cannot row any one else’s boat; we can only row the boat of OUR own lives; rowing it as best we can, gently down the stream of life. What could be more Natural. I know all of us who enjoyed Socho Ogui’s opening meditation at the Orange County hosted Family Conference will never again listen to or sing this simple song without thinking of its wonderful Dharma images. It is, as Socho Ogui said, “a beautiful song… that has a natural Dharma Message.”

This is true, Life is a dream. All too soon we will look back on our lives and say, “It was like a dream.”

Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream; merrily, merrily, merrily; life is but a dream… Namo Amida Butsu…”

After he sang this softly one time, he said, “Everyone, please join me in singing this song again.” The singing was sporadic; people thought he was nuts. I knew what he was going to do, so I loved every moment. I sang loudly. I think folks around me thought I had lost it too. Socho asked everyone to join in and sing together. "Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream; merrily, merrily, merrily; life is but a dream…. Namo Amida Butsu…”

Socho went on to explain how he heard this song on the radio… and how he felt it very simply captured so many essential aspects of the Buddha-Dharma. Think about it. Let’s examine the lyrics. “Row, row, row your boat” - can represent the simple everyday activity we engage in everyday; just rowing the boat of our lives. Where are we going? “Gently down the stream…” Rowing the boat of our lives…not frantically…not in a rush or hurry… but GENTLY rowing… gently down the stream of life.

Socho added, “We can row upstream if we wish… but we will soon get very tired.” It is more NATU- RAL to simply go with the flow; Gently…down the stream; Enjoying the simple act of rowing… and of living… and enjoying the simple everyday activity of our everyday lives. And how do we row… how do we live? “Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily…” Living with Joy and gratitude… For “Life is but a dream… Namo Amida Butsu…” I remember when I was a much younger minister at the LA Betsuin. I attended the 88th Birthday Party for one of our Issei Seniors. At the Party I congratulated him and said, “Ojisan, Onajobito Omoteoto!” “Happy Birthday!” His thought-ful response was, “Yume mitai…” “It was like a dream.” He added, “Seems like yesterday I was 18.”

Buddhism often describes life as an illusive dream. “Row, row, row your boat; gently down the stream; merrily, merrily, merrily; life is but a dream…” There is such a soft feeling of Naturalness to the images of this song. It gives one the feeling of floating through a beautiful Ohigan day… living fully and enjoying the Moment that is NOW with nowhere else to be. In this simple children’s song, there is no talk or explanation of where our boat WAS… OR… where it is GOING; there is no concern for the Past or the Future; no mention of the boat’s Origin or Destination; no concern for the Purpose of why we are even in the boat just rowing. We are simply rowing our boat, the boat of our lives; Happily in the Moment that is NOW. No other time to think about; No other place to be; No one else but me…rowing the boat of my life. And we each must row our own boat. No one will row it for us; Just as each of us must be responsible for the Karma of our lives. No one else.

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WOBTSO
The Transmission of Shin Buddhism in the West, 
Jodo Shinshu Religious Educational Process

Written by Seigen H. Yamaoka

Buddhism as we know it is a religion of translation, the teaching moving across geographical and cultural boundaries through the exchange of language. But transmission of Dharma is not just a matter of skillful or accurate linguistics. Rather, it suggests a depth and breadth of experiential integrity that in and of itself gives rise to the teaching expressed anew, in language rooted in the continuum of the defining sensibilities and experiences of the new followers, language that resonates for their time and their place. Seigen Yamaoka’s The Transmission of Shin Buddhism in the West is a work of and about authentic transmission.

An American of Japanese descent, Yamaoka is a Shin Bud- dhist, a follower of Jodo Shinshu, or Shinshu, which means the True Essence of the Pure Land Way. Founded in Japan by Shinran (1173-1262), Shinshu originally manifested as a rejec- tion of the established institutional authority of the time and as a way of Buddha Dharma open and suited to the needs of the masses. In this country, Shinshu has been practiced predominantly in ethnic Japanese communities, but more recently has been spreading to Asian American congregants. Except for a period from 1981 to 1996, when he served as Bishop of the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), the administra- tive arm of some sixty-five Shinshu temples and fellowships across mainland United States, Yamaoka has been a temple minister in California, serving the needs of this lay Buddhist sangha, whose history here goes back over 100 years. His book is the result of his personal efforts and experience in the ministry and the collective history of this sangha.

Yamaoka’s is one of two important works that have appeared in the Shinshu community this year, both worthy of attention and both ground-breaking in their effort to cut through what many feel has been a paralyzing reliance on traditional doctrinal language to convey the Shinshu message. The other work is Takamaro Shigaraki’s A Life of Awakening: The Heart of the Shin Buddhist Path, translated from the Japanese by David Matsumoto of the BCA’s Institu- tute of Buddhist Studies. Conversely, Yamaoka’s book has been translated from the original English, into Japanese, and will be published in Japan early this summer. The book is overpop- ping and complimentary, but Yamaoka’s unique contribution lies in that his book is a de- velopment of the underlying experi- ence and the practice that he has generally assumed and left unarticulated in Shinshu literature. Rather than moving from doctrine to experience, Yamaoka grounds his book in real life situations and ties these back to the teachings, relentlessly questioning both. In doing so, he breathes new life into and reveals the living experience of the Pure Land Dharma Gate known as Shin Buddhism. The sub-title of Yamaoka’s book is the Jodo Shinshu Religious Educational Process. In Yamaoka’s way of thinking, “practice” in Buddha Dharma means education; in order to assist unenlightened beings in realizing the whole, unfractured truth of their living and dying, every school of Buddhism devel- ops educational processes, even if not articulated as such. And although the emphasis in this book is on a pragmatic, tradition-based Shinshu, Yamaoka explores its universal dimensions; he clearly sees the processes he discusses as universal to the human experi- ence, therefore all-inclusive. It is this which underscores what I believe will be the source of the broader appeal and value in his work, well beyond the Shinshu community, extending to all seri- ous students and followers of Buddha Dharma.

Based upon his experience in pastoral care and counseling and his personal experiences of many instances of healing and spiritual transformation, he has devel- oped a framework through which we can explore and appreciate the natural human processes of self reflection, development and growth, the awareness of which, when informed and enriched by the religious and spiritual heri- tage of Shinshu, awakens us to the unlimited stores of meaning inherent in every life experience. The framework is rendered as the “Six Characteristics of The Human Life Process (Six Char- acteristics)” and the correspond- ing “Six Aspects of Endowed Shinjin (Six Aspects)” (Shinjin being the pivotal transformative experience in Shinshu). Yama- oka asserts that the processes reflected therein can show us “how the essence of universal religious truth can be distilled and personal meaning how it can be recognized within the context of an individual’s life experiences.”

Yamaoka’s painstaking and methodical in showing that his Six Characteristics are not fabri- cated principles, nor is the description of Shinran’s magnum opus, the Kyo Gyo Shin Sho, a difficult work, even for the most ardent and educated follower. And we receive as well positive, at times, important insig- nificant; any encoun- ter, every encounter, all encoun- ters arise within the causes and conditions of our living and have the potential to open into and set in motion spontaneous processes of awareness, wherein we are caught and changed by it. As a result of our own voluntary, as well as involuntary, decisions of the present moment, which are thereby reflected therein can show us “how the essence of universal religious truth can be distilled and personal meaning how it can be recognized within the context of an individual’s life experiences.”

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This isn’t actually the first time I’ve found myself being drawn toward ministry. Several years ago, before I converted to Jodo Shinshu, I was active in Soto Zen practice. I had begun to feel that I wanted to do something not only to enhance my own practice as a Buddhist, but to help others in their efforts to understand the Dharma. Was there, I wondered, a Zen form of a ‘deacon’? In many Christian denomina- tions, a deacon is a person who engages in the service – at the service and direction of the bishop – without actually being ordained a priest or minister. They may serve a parish, in jail, or hospitals in a wide variety of capacities.

I liked that idea. I wasn’t sure going to school for sev- eral more years held much appeal for me, but I wanted to do something of service, something in gratitude for the experiences I’d had as a Zen Buddhist. A Soto Zen minister with whom I’d done a number of sesshins in Alaska – the Rev. Jan Choen Bays – gave me disappointing news. In that form of Bud- dhism, there really wasn’t an equivalent position. In time, due to other fac- tors, I became disillusioned with my practice and gradu- ally withdrew from Zen. Luckily, however, I was beginning to doubt myself as a Buddhist at all. I met a Shin minister in Alaska who introduced me to the teachings of Shihan Shonin. I found myself drawn toward Buddhism again. This time around, however, I knew I needed something to do some- thing that would enhance and deepen my practice. That opportunity came when my temple announced it was looking for some- one to volunteer to fill the role of minister’s assis- tant. I jumped. I found myself enrolled in the Minister’s Assistant’s Pro- gram, or MAP Quest, as it’s become known. Still in the formative stages, MAP Quest is a program designed to teach the denomination’s lay members how to assist their own ministers in carrying out some of the day-to-day functions of temple life. Taking care of the altar, for example, or represent- ing the temple at various community functions; being the minister’s right hand. The hope is that those who enroll in this pro- gram will go on to become ordained ministers in the near future. That is happen- ing. For the Buddhist Churches of America, it’s a vital and almost life preserving action. Like denominations from all religions, the BCA is suffering from a decline in ordained ministers. Bigger Christian denominations aren’t immune, either. But for a denomination as small as ours, the poten- tial outcome of a shortage of ministers could mean a death knell for the BCA. At the first MAP Quest training last year, there were about two dozen participants from all over the country: California, Colorado, and Washington. At other training sessions there were participants from coming Arizona and Utah, as well. Many of

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Book Review

A thorough and thoroughly readable work, it is a superb introduction to the understanding of Shinshu as an independent path to awakening and a journey for the layholder. In short, his work is a first-rate reference source, accessible and valuable for both experienced followers and those new to Shinshu.

Also included is a concise presentation of Shinshu's grounding and position within general Buddhism. This is important because, historically, not only is Shinshu misunderstood, it has even, at times, been charged as not being Buddhism at all. As to the proposition that Shinshu's,

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WHEEL OF DHARMA

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BCA Board Meeting

Auditor will be Ron Murakami (White River). The National Council will vote to ratify this slate. Dr. Gordon Bermant will be the BCA President for 2006-2007 (he is the current president-elect).

Judy Kono, Chair of the Ad Hoc Youth Advocacy Committee announced that the Committee was abandoning its pursuit for a National Youth Director due to financial uncertainties involving the BCA Campaign. Since this goal was the main reason for forming the committee, the ad hoc committee dissolved. The National Board approved creating a standing committee for Youth Advocacy.

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Reflections

thirty participants had already received their tokudai ordination.

Right now, I'm grappling with the question as to how far I want to go with this. I want to serve the Dharma; I want to serve my temple.

Being a minister is hard work. I see much more clearly, half the middle of the night, people demanding his services sometimes on the spur of the moment, working seven days a week, and I feel there are always social, always occurs in the context of interrelation-ship. And so, he calls us to full participation in life, full partici-pation "in the development of the awakening process "within ourselves and in society."

Within this context, it is our good fortune that Yamaoka brought forth his "Six Aspects of Life Stories," examples of his ministerial experiences, followed by brief discussions of each story with the audience.

Mirroring the skillful means of Buddha, who brought the Dharma to this world, Shinran taught that in a way that person could understand,iman emphasizes the unequivocal affirmation of the truth of the Dharma. In Shinshu, it refers to the Abso-lute Truth of the Dharma, or Suchness. Called "Other-Power" because it is the power of the Buddha, the Truth of the Dharma, and within the context of ordinary life, daily life, which further involves a continuous inner shifting from the illusory and unworthy, to that which is true and real. In this end, how to achieve a state of untroubled conscience is a spontaneous reflective process that radically affects the spirit, the ego to free itself—complete reliance on Other Power means "no self" effort is the essence of transformation. At the heart of Shinshu and repeated through-out Yamaoka's work is the teaching of gratitude and joy for what one has received from the work-ing of Dharm

Yamaoka shares his personal story of his experiences in ordination and in any place—"is partici-pating" in the development of the awakening process "within oneself and in society."

As he reveals these sto ries, the meaning they hold for the people involved and the meaning they continue to hold for him, it is clear that his oft-repeated phrase, "as a Bud-dhist Minister," suggests far too narrow a range for the work he describes. "As a Buddhist Minister" might be more accurate. For he describes a way that we all might better attend to our spiri-tual needs. An "All-in-One Buddhism" might be more accurate. For he describes a way that we all might better attend to our spiri-tual needs. An "All-in-One Buddhism" might be more accurate. For he describes a way that we all might better attend to our spiri-tual needs. An "All-in-One Buddhism" might be more accurate.