New Year's Greeting

At the beginning of the year, I would like to send you my greetings from Hongwanji in Kyoto.

Upon succeeding the position as Monshu, thirty-six years and nine months have passed. I have come to empathize with Chinese master, Shan-tao, as he writes in Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land, “Caught up in everyday life, the days and nights go left unnoticed, unable to become emancipated and escape the sea of suffering.” I shall vow to work diligently until my term comes to an end this June.

For many of us, although the passing of time seems to speed up with age, in recent years, changes within society have sped up, making things all the more unsettling. Because these rapid transitions are largely the result of developments in scientific technology and economic growth, they sometimes produce dis- crepancies in individual lifeways and societal framework. The gap among socio-economic concerns including business corpora- tions and people’s lifestyles are widening that both domestic and international efforts have not been successful in dealing with such issues. As a result, there is a sense that neither reflect- ing on the past nor thinking ahead into the future matters, so long as we are content with the present. However, this mental- ity will result in repeating past mistakes or passing burdens on to future generations.

It is not that the role of Buddhism is to provide us who live in this constantly changing world, with an unaltering spiritual foundation to live the life which we have received to the fullest? In Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, that foundation is the Primal Vow of Amida Tathagata, namely Namo Amida Butsu. Being uncondi- tionally embraced by Amida Tathagata, we are enabled to accept our own inconvenient past and at this very moment, be joyous of this life we have received.

May we all continue to live every day of this year in appre- ciation of the Nembutsu.

January 1, 2014

OHTANI Koshin

Monshu

Jodo Shinshu Hongan-ji

The Significance of a Name

By Rev. Dr. David Matsumoto

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013)

IMPRISONED FOR 27 YEARS BY A SOUTH AFRICAN govern- ment on the basis of his life, he was dis- possessed of his name and called by a number. But his name remained outside of the prison walls, among those struggling for freedom in South Africa and those opposing apartheid throughout the world.

Mandela had many names. His given name was “Rolih- lahla,” meaning “troublemaker.” When still a young man, he was given the name “Nelson.” “Nelson” was the name given to him by his teacher on his first day of school. He never went by his father’s name, Xhosa name, and was given the name “DabiLungi,” which means “con- vener of dialogue.”

In his 20s he joined the African National Congress and became ac- tively involved in campaigns of civil disobedience against the South Afri- can policy of apartheid. Through protests, strikes and later plans for armed struggle, Nelson Mandela became a leader in the movement to rid the country of its policies of segregation and inequality. A series of arrests and convictions followed, culminating in a 1964 trial in which he and others were convicted of sabotage and sentenced to life im- prisonment. For the next 27 years he lived in isolation as inmate #466/64.

But the movement for freedom in So. Africa was not forgotten, and people there and throughout the world remembered and spoke of his name. Finally, decades of struggle, boycotts, strikes, and divestment led to his release from prison in 1990. Mandela quickly set about working to unite the nation, not through retribution, but through forgive- ness.

Mandela began to negotiate with F.W. de Klerk to hold the first multi-racial elections in South Afri- ca. For their efforts, the two were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1994, Nelson Mandela was elected to South Africa’s first black president. He immediately em- barked on a mission of racial recon- ciliation, government rebuilding and economic rehabilitation. In a unifying moment, he donated the green jersey of the Springboks rugby team – beloved by whites, despised by blacks – to present the World Cup trophy to the team while the crowd erupted in cheers of “Nelson! Nelson!”

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In his later years, Mandela was known to his countrymen simply as “Madiba,” a tribal name of great honor, “Tata” (father) and “Khulu” (Great One). His rejection of ven- geance led him to assume roles— from freedom fighter and prisoner, to world symbol, leader of the struggle against racial oppression, and president of a new nation. Nelson Mandela was able to retain his name and his humanity, and became a great beacon for equality and reconciliation.

What’s in a Name?

In Shakespeare’s play, Romeo and Juliet, this famous line: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” In urging Romero to re- nounce their common names, Juliet makes a familiar argument: A name is just a name. It is a word or label. It is not the essence of a person. Again, this is familiar logic. But, it is always true?

What’s in a name? Certainly, our family names may not be able to keep it throughout life unless we change it or renounce it (as Juliet would have had the two star-crossed lovers do). Usually, our first names were chosen by our parents. Maybe they liked the name. Maybe it was the name of a family member or a family custom. Perhaps it was popu- lar or unusual. Or perhaps our chosen name represented our parents’ hopes and dreams for us. There are many reasons for a name and so the one who lets his or her “name” slip away.

A name tells us a lot about a person. It signifies meaning for and about us. What if we were suddenly to have no name? What would we lose? I think that we would lose a great deal. For instance, without a name we would lose our sense of identity. We would also lose our sense of connection with others (family, ancestors), our place in the world (community, ethnicity) and our sense of history. When we lose our name we also lose our face. We become a faceless “them,” a number, or a byte of data. When we lose our name we also lose our voice. No one can recog- nize us or hear us. That is why, as was the case for Nelson Mandela, our names are sometimes taken away from us by others, the authorities, or our oppres- sors. They may try to take away our names in order to take away our sense of self, our minds, or our hu- manity. But all too often we are the ones who let our “name” slip away.

My Appreciation for Shinran Shonin

By Rev. Kodo Umezu

BERKELEY BUDDHIST TEMPLE

Hoon-ko

My appreciation for Shinran Shonin

During the month of January, many temples and churches observe a very special service called Hoon-ko. It is a service to honor the founder of the Jodo Shinshu School of Buddhism, Shinran Shonin (1175-1263). Hoon-ko is the main service in our tradition and is the origin of our religious organiza- tion. The term Hoon-ko means “a ser- vice or a gathering to express apprecia- tion” and is used by many other Buddhist orders in Japan. Therefore, the Hoon-ko that we observe is or- dinary called “Shinsho Shonin Hoon-ko” to specify that the service is a gathering to express our appreciation for Shinran Shonin on his memorial day.

My Childhood Memories

While growing up in Japan, during my grammar school years, my temple in Fukusa observed Hoon-ko for an en- tire week, from January 2 to January 9. Though the observance lasted seven days, it required more than two weeks of preparation. About a week before the service we had to clean the hondo, polish the brass items and ornaments in the sanctuary, and decorate the altar. We relied on a group of five or six members called Hana-ko (flower arrangement group), who were in charge of arranging special flowers for the altar. About one week before the service they went to the nearby mountain and picked back piles of pine and bamboo branches. They secluded themselves in a special room behind the hondo where they spent many days creating two pairs of tiny mochi rice cakes. These small mochi cakes were stuck on bamboo skewers, tied around wooden cylinders, painted, and placed around the altars as offerings to Amida Buddha and Shinran Shonin.

Our Hoon-ko was one of the big- gest events in my village. It required every villager to come out and help put on the services. In the morning of the first day, heating devices with burning charcoal (tobiko) were placed in the Honda as we waited for people to come. The series of Hoon-ko services began with an early morning service at 5 a.m., then another one at 10 a.m. The afternoon service began at 1:30 p.m. and the last one was at 7:30 p.m. Some members stayed at my temple for seven days to attend each and every service. Oshi-Don was served every day. The menu was all vegetarian dishes. I remember sometimes sake was served. Many Buddhist Women’s Association members who were in charge of cooking reahed the gagaku music to be played during the services. The peo- ple of Hana-ko and Gakunin were
Happy New Year!

By Rev. Kodo Umezu
BCA Bishop

As we start the New Year, I would like to express my deep appreciation to you for your support and guidance throughout the year 2013 and ask for your continued support again for 2014. When I took office in 2012, I emphasized that we need to focus on Buddhist education. Many people have shown me their support since then. The Center for the Buddhist Education (CBE) is now in second year under new co-directorship and is excelling on fine tuning and enhancing the quality of its programs. The George T. and Sakaye Aranami Foundation has completed its pledge to the CBE Educational Endowment Fund. Hongwanji has provided financial support to ministers in order to help them attend the Continuing Education Program held in Berkeley last November. The Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) Board of Directors was able to re-establish the balance of the California Bank and Trust loan last year, so we can focus on other areas. However, we still have a $4 million loan from the BCA Endowment Foundation that we need to pay off and re-pay.

Another change that is taking place this year is a change of the editorial direction of the Wheel of Dharma. Rev. Ronald Kohata has been the English editor for this newspaper for the last seven years. I want to thank him for his dedication and commitment and for mission of sharing the dharma with all. The Wheel of Dharma is a vehicle by which we transmit our appreciation of the dharma with over 11,000 subscribers. We are fortunate to have the guidance of my predecessor, Rev. Ichiro Nagata, who had edited the Wheel of Dharma in the past. He helped me locate a person to work on the layout of the Wheel of Dharma. He did a superb job and can now work on the remaining building loans from the Buddhist Churches of America (BCAF). Paying back our loans to the BCAF may take several years, but we should be encouraged and very proud of paying off all our old bank loans. I hope we can continue to build a solid base for propagating our work overseas successfully. With the Center for Buddhist Education developing nourishing programs and with Rev. Umezu leading us, we are making good progress on fulfilling our mission of Buddhist education. We are moving forward on addressing the need for funding to reduce the burden for prospective ministers.

As the Wheel (continues) to Turn

By Rev. Ronald Kobata
Buddhist Church of San Francisco

As our terrestrial home begins another revolution around and through the circuitry of our solar system I offer the traditional Japanese New Year’s greeting, Shinnen Akemashite. At the same time this means to announce the ending of my English editorship of the Wheel of Dharma. Nine years ago I was just beginning my “return” to the Buddhist Churches of America after enjoying 24 years of Shin Buddhism ministry with the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. As part of my becoming the Executive Assistant to the then Bishop Koshin Ogui, I was assigned take on the responsibility of editing the Wheel of Dharma. Both responsibilities were very new challenges that my previous thirty years as a kaidokoro didn’t necessarily prepare me for.

As is the general rule in life we just do the best we can with whatever resources and means that are available.

For the Executive Assistant’s duties I was fortunate to have the guidance of my predecessors, both for the work and help me get on track to run the editor. The editor’s role was quite a different situation though I did have the benefit of another editor who had edited the Wheel of Dharma in the past. He helped me locate a person to work on the layout of articles, advised me about gathering materials for publication, and the distribution of the monthly issues.

A few months into the role as editor I had a very fortunate conversation with a young woman for whom I had conducted his wedding ceremony many years before. Just as the production process was about to begin she would not be able to continue I was introduced to Jeffery Kimoto. He was involved in publishing his own community newspaper, NokaloWest, and an arm of the newspapers was Sunday publications. Jeffery contracted with BCA to become the production manager for the Wheel of Dharma. He [Japanese] monthly newspaper. Through his expertise as a publisher himself and generosity in sharing his resources for producing the Wheel we see the results in the full coloration and the layout formats he employs.

Let’s shout our love (Nembutsu) in the center of the Hondo!!

By Rev. Katuya Kasunoki
Buddhist Church of Lodl

Happy New Year! I always make resolutions at the beginning of the year. One of my 2013’s resolutions was to make my baseball’s batting average over .300. Unfortunately, I am not a good batter like John Sanyo. My batting average was way below .300. I could not achieve my 2013 resolution. But I will try to make my batting average better in 2014.

What is your 2014 resolution? Some younger generations may make their resolutions at the beginning of the year. Let’s talk about the New Year. Let’s think about a general love story where a man tells his feelings to a lady. A man has to ask a lady who he loves out on a date. He needs to invite to her to lunch, dinner, or for a drive. They meet somewhere. They go somewhere together. He talks a lot. He asks some questions to get more information about her. However, it is very difficult for him to express his feelings. He hesitates to tell his feelings, he honors his Ancestor’s memory and will be able to get together again.

As we start the New Year, I want to express my love for my teacher. I want to deepen my kagyo (meditation practice). I want to deepen my understanding of Amida’s Vow. I want to be present at our Shinran Shonin’s 850th birthday. I want to be a better teacher. I want to be a better Buddhist minister. I want to be a better person.

Welcome to 2014!

By Rev. Kodo Umezu
BCA Bishop

One of the major concerns presented at the beginning of my term was how to find enough materials to fill the six pages of the English section. Gratefully this concern did not materialize. Throughout the year I had to decide which submissions to hold over for future editions, or to serialize over a number of different articles. Though on occasion I would have to send reminders about due dates, and anxiously wait to see if an article was forthcoming. I have been fortunate to have many people who were willing to share their experiences sharing the practice of Dharma in writing, report on special events, and give expression to the many ways that our “fellow travelers” (Ondo-bo real- life, experience moving on and live the Path of Nembutsu in America. I truly intended to correspondents and readers alike for keeping the Wheel turning with this fruitful essays.

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By Ron Murakami

During my years of involvement with the Buddhist Churches of America, nothing has been more mystifying than the Zaidan Fund. However, if you’re familiar with the BCA’s Early Foundation Council, then you are already aware of the Zaidan Fund and the story behind it. The Zaidan Fund was established with a goal of $500,000 as its foundation. It was established with a goal of $1 million, which was achieved in 1999. The BCA National Council approved the establishment of a separate fund with the Zaidan Fund in 1982 and the BCA Campaign – 21st Century in 2003. Both of these were capital campaigns that substantially added to the Zaidan Fund. The Zaidan was kept as a separate fund and its annual and district convention earnings from the Zaidan Fund have been used for special projects such as assisting the BCA website start-up, for special projects and ministers’ workshops, for warm-up and ongoing funding of the Center for Buddhist Education, and more recently to help pay off the bank loan for the Jodo Shinshu Community Education Foundation. The Zaidan name was changed to the Buddhist Churches of America Endowment Foundation (BCAEF), with the fund goal raised to $1 million, which was achieved in 1999.

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Winter MAP Reflections

Jodo Shinshu Correspondence Course

Throughout the year, the Wheel of Dharma will feature an essay written by one of the over 150 students who have enrolled in this Hongwanji-sponsored online course since 2008. See details of the 2-year course at www.JSCC.bce-bca.org

Why did Shinran Shonin choose the calligraphic written Name as the central object of worship? by Christopher Caldwell

Shinran Shonin's decision to use the calligraphic written Name of Amida Buddha as the central object of worship serves a number of purposes: religious, political, and practical. Theoretically, it draws worship and thought to the central focus of Jodo Shinshu: the Nembutsu. It is also a counterpart to the tendency among nobles to embrace opulent forms of worship, with a great emphasis on appearance of devotion, but little self-reflection. This gesture among the nobility was a result of the belief that the era was in mappo, or the decline of the Buddhist teachings. Shinran's reliance on the written Name provides a much-needed alternative to the nobility's mad rush to throw money in desperation for salvation, and brought the focus, theologically, to the truth of Namo Amida Butsu.

In a sense, Shinran's promotion of the simple focus of devotion, the calligraphic written Name, is as political as it is religious. As discussed in the Wheel, the written Name serves as a powerful, populist antithesis to expensive stately forms and forms of iconography that could really only be acquired by the wealthy. Shinran's approach not only corrects theological excesses, but also effectively moves worship from the exclusive to the inclusive, fostering an atmosphere of prayer that goes beyond the materialistic object of worship to the eternal truths of faith and the Dharma. This shift was a necessary response to the changing social structure of the time, brought about by economic and political tumult. In many ways, it was a precursor to our more contemporary focus on serving all people, not just the wealthy. Shinran's approach not only corrects theological excesses, but also effectively moves worship from the exclusive to the inclusive, fostering an atmosphere of prayer that goes beyond the materialistic object of worship to the eternal truths of faith and the Dharma.

To show our appreciation for your continued support of The Hidden Lamp we are offering a 20% discount on this hardcover and paperback edition. To order your copy, go to www.bcabookstore.com, email: sales@bcabookstore.com or phone: (510) 809-1435. The BCA Bookstore is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Like us on Facebook.
In the book, The Buddha’s Wish for the World, by our Gomonzu, Koshin Ottani, he cites a temple in Japan that has written on the wall the following creed, regarding how one should listen to the Dharma.

1. You should listen as if you are listening for the very first time.
2. You should listen as if the message is for you alone.
3. You should listen as if this is the last time that you will ever do so in your life.

When we begin to think of these three important points, we often stop and think about them. Shinran Shonin always took a self-centeredness, it was talking about his. As we begin a new year, these three important points should be a model for us to follow. We could attend the temple and listen to the Dharma our whole lives and miss this crucial point.

Once I spoke at another temple and after the service, during the refreshments, a lady came up to me and complimented me on my sermon. She felt that my message on self-centeredness was very important. I thought, “Gee, this lady was really listening.” But then, in the next sentence she said, “But you know what? The one person who really needed to listen to that message was my husband. He is the most self-centered guy!”

This lady missed the whole point of the sermon. Shinran Shonin always takes a subjective perspective when he reflected on the teachings. The teachings were not talking about someone else’s self-centeredness; it was talking about his.

The third most important point in listening is the fact that we should listen as if today might be the last time. If we think that we always have next week, or next month, or next year to listen, we will never listen with a sense of urgency. One never knows what might happen even tomorrow, so we must listen as if today might be the last time.

As we begin a new year, these three important points should be a model for us to follow as Shin Buddhists. To listen as if it is the first time, to listen as if the message is meant for you alone, and to listen as if it might be the last time you will be able to listen. If we listen with these three principles in mind, we will truly be listening with our heart.
Continued from Front Page

On the last day of school 2013 ended with the National Board Meeting at the Jodo-Shinshu Center (JSC) on Dec. 7, and a wonderful experience with visiting friends and acquaintances who were working at the JSC during the same weekend. The time we shared with these individuals lasted but a few minutes each but it allowed us to capture the feelings from our various trips during the year. We were especially grateful to everyone who was so thoughtful, sincere, and positive people. Thank you to all for helping brighten the world.

In Gassho

Rev. Kobata
Continued from Page 2

The Buddhist Church of San Francisco’s Winter 2013 issue features this photo of the BCSF’s participation in the 19th Annual One田野, one churches, one temple, one home ceremony at the JSC on Dec. 7, and a wonderful experience with visiting friends and acquaintances who were working at the JSC during the same weekend. The time we shared with these individuals lasted but a few minutes each but it allowed us to capture the feelings from our various trips during the year. We were especially grateful to everyone who was so thoughtful, sincere, and positive people. Thank you to all for helping brighten the world.

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大佛世会婦界

2015年5月30日(土)31日 京都喜多院
大会が日本で開催されました。喜多院議事社は
世界仏教女性会議開催と、京都の具体活動を
PRするため、女性の声を活かした、地元の
活動支援や、地元の文化をPRする内容に
特に力を入れています。

念仏の声を世界に！

葬地本願寺のローバルに向け

報恩講では

新しい先生が着任！

16日、報恩講の寄席で、新しい先生が
着任されました。報恩講の寄席は、每
月の寄席で、報恩講の先生が、寄席の
音楽を演奏し、寄席の先生としての
役割を果たすものです。
ご門主さま新年のご挨拶

年賀の辞

光栄に思う新年度をおかします。京都の本山寺を離れ、京門主が京門主に

今年もとぎょうの日をいただき、ご門主様のご教示に従って、

（本文）

新年のご挨拶

実証研の創設者・専務理事 木村 光明

（本文）

おめでとうございます！

12月1日、アイスクリーム店で開催

おめでとうございます！

（本文）