

## The Light from a Star

For many years I had the great fortune of serving with Rev. Akio Miyaji, who is now retired and living in Japan. Often in his funeral sermons, Rev. Miyaji used to share a true story about an experience he had many years ago while serving at the Seattle Betsuin. While serving there, he had to conduct a very sad and tragic funeral for a young Japanese couple who were both killed in a car accident while traveling to go skiing. This couple had a young son, only 7 or 8 years of age. The boy survived the accident, but the parents didn't. After the funeral service, the little boy went up to Rev. Miyaji and asked him the question, "Where did my parents go? Where are my parents now?" Such a sad and difficult question to answer to a young child who had lost both of his parents.

Rev. Miyaji could have given a doctrinal answer like they are in Nirvana, or they are in the Pure Land, but instead, he took the little boy outside of the temple, and he pointed up in the night sky. He pointed to a very bright star shining in the evening sky. He said to the boy, "Your parents are there. They are that bright star. When you miss your parents, just look up at the shining star and you will be with them." The boy seemed to be consoled. He returned to Japan to be raised by his uncle.

For years and years, every New Years, Rev. Miyaji used to receive a Season's greeting card from that boy, who had grown up to be a young man. He used to write in his card, "Sensei, I have never forgotten that lesson that you gave me that night at my parents' funeral."

When I attended college at the University of Oregon, I took a class on Astronomy, as an elective. It was a fascinating class in which we learned about planets and stars and galaxies. I remember learning that many of the stars that we see at night, those stars have actually died, but because they are so far away from us, light years away, that we continue to receive the light from a star that has actually died long ago.

We might lose dear loved ones, but they too continue to give us light, like a star that has already perished, but continues to illuminate the sky.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the great Vietnamese Buddhist master, also gives a similar teaching. In one of his books, he talks about the light of a candle. A candle burns vertically, and we think that when the wax is gone, and the flame has been extinguished that the "life" of the candle is also gone. But Thich Nhat Hanh says, "No, the candle, as it has been burning, is giving out light and warmth. Even when the flame is gone, the light and warmth that the candle has been giving, continues to spread out into the world.

What a beautiful image that is for us as we live in a world that often becomes dark and cold. The light of the Buddha, the light of the Dharma, the light of wisdom, is an unobstructed light. There is nowhere that it cannot reach. There is no one or nothing that does not receive or is embraced in that light. We may not see it, or be aware of it at all times, but it reaches everywhere, even into the darkness of my own heart.

If we come to receive, to encounter that light in our lives, then like a candle, our life too will give light and warmth to others. May we come to receive, to encounter the light of the Buddha, the light of Namuamidabutsu, and may that light be shared with all beings.

Namuamidabutsu,

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