LIVING THROUGH A PANDEMIC

Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Statement on COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread throughout the world and shows little sign of ending. Here in Japan, we have entered a new stage with the announcement of the state of emergency.

First, I wish to express our sincerest condolences to those in Japan and the rest of the world, who have passed on due to COVID-19 pandemic. And to those who have become ill, we send our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Moreover, we express our deepest admiration and gratitude to all the doctors, nurses and medical staff for their heroic effort to treat and save the patients, even at the high risk of danger to themselves.

During this crisis, people around the world are confronting the enormous set of challenges by working together through mutual cooperation and encouragement. However, it has been pointed out that one of the causes for the spread of the disease lies in the actions of asymptomatic people who are unaware that they have contracted the virus. We must, therefore, understand the dangers and the correct response to the virus and act accordingly. We are requesting everyone to show genuine concern for one another so as not to allow the spread of any kind of discrimination and prejudice. Let us act properly based on our careful consideration of the implications of our action.

COVID-19 Claims the Life of OCBC Member
Klete Ikemoto, 52, Is Remembered as Devoted ‘Girl Dad’

Orange County Buddhist Church Sangha member Klete Kei Ikemoto, 52, who passed away April 2 of the novel coronavirus, is being remembered as a man of quiet strength who was totally devoted to his family — especially to his three daughters — according to the Rafu Shimpo newspaper in Los Angeles.

Iketomo was born in Harbor City in Southern California and graduated from the Marshall School of Business with a Bachelor of Science degree. He played basketball for the Nisei Athletic Union. Before joining the Yoga Corporation of America as director of forecasting and inventory management in Salt Lake Buddhist Temple

Gripped in Fear, Grasped in Amida’s Fearless Compassion

Sentient beings’ wrong views grow rampant,
Becoming like thicketets and forests, bramble and thorns,
Filled with suspicion, they slander those who follow the nembutsu,
While the use of violence and the poison of anger spread widely.

— From the “Shosanmitsu” wasan (“Hymns of the Dharma Ages,” CWS I, Page 400)

are saying in the news. But not only that — when I look into my own mind, my own thoughts are worse than the news.

I view some leaders with disgust and condemnation, people without masks with suspicion and distrust, and worry about how and when this nightmare is going to end, so I can get my old life back.

Recently I went to a garden store, itching to get some flowers planted. There, I was jolted out of my reverie by a man talking so loud the whole store was looking at him. He didn’t seem to care; he was so engrossed in almost screaming at his minions, young guys about half his age, right up to their faces — without a mask!

Immediately I whipped out my phone, held it up as if I were filming him (which I wanted to but I wasn’t close enough) and slowly approached him. By the time I was in good range, he had his mask up. I smugly thought to myself, “Ha! Gotcha!” My righteous indignation was

Summit Held on Tech’s Role in Spreading Dharma
Strategy, Ideas Raised in How to Inform, Connect With Sangha

With the coronavirus pandemic sweeping across the world and shutting down in-person temple services and events, the BCA and temple leaders held a summit to discuss how online technology can be used to help the Sangha stay informed and connected — socially and spiritually.

Approximately 55 people from more than 24 BCA temples, including those in Canada and Hawaii, took part in an April 25 Technology Webinar presented by CBE and the BCA Communications Committee. The summit was held virtually on Zoom — an online video conferencing app.

The Communications Committee website subcommittee provided a virtual tour of what BCA is doing online, including Facebook (Tyler Moriguchi), BCA website (Jim Shimomaye), YouTube Channel and BCA Connect emails (John Mullins and

By Rev. Dr. Carmela Javellana Hirano
Salt Lake Buddhist Temple

The above passage brings to mind all the things people
Amid COVID-19, We Receive Nembutsu’s True Compassion

By Rev. Marlin Harada
BCA Bishop

Recently, I discovered some wonderful music video called “Live From Daryl’s House.” Daryl Hall, of the popular 1970s and 1980s American pop rock duo Hall and Oates, brings in various artists to play music with his band at his house. It is so amazing to watch. You feel like you are in the room with them. Daryl Hall brings in various artists, young and old, and they play some of that artist’s songs, and they play some of Daryl Hall’s hit songs, and sometimes they play songs that were neither of theirs.

In those videos, they often record the dinner conversation that they have with the guest artist. One video that really stood out was a conversation that they were having over dinner with legendary Motown and soul-songwriter Smokey Robinson.

Smokey was saying how he had been composing music since he was 15 years old. What gave him the biggest thrill in life was to hear another artist play or sing one of his songs. He would be thrilled if he could hear any artist play some of his songs, and Smokey would say that he didn’t care who that artist was or how it was done so long as they were creative and made their own rendition of one of his songs.

Daryl Hall agreed totally with Smokey and said that he felt exactly the same. It was a thrill to hear someone do one of your songs, and you both loved any rendition or version of your music. It made me think, “Why wouldn’t religion be the same? Why wouldn’t Shinran Sho-nin be thrilled that the Jodo Shinshu that he shared over 750 years ago, was now being given a new ‘rendition,’ a new version?”

Wouldn’t Shinran Sho-nin be elated to see the Nembutsu taking new forms in new lands? What if he could see that the Dharma talks via Facebook or YouTube, and making the teachings accessible to anyone and anywhere in the world! Wouldn’t Shinran Sho-nin be happy and say that he could see that now? The Dharma that had taken centuries to travel from India, through China, Korea, and finally to reach him in Japan, is now being shared all over the world in an instant.

This is Amida Buddha. This is Amida Buddha. This is True Compassion, True Compassion being the realization that any of us can be elated to see the Nembutsu taking new forms in new lands? What if he could see that the Dharma talks via Facebook or YouTube, and making the teachings accessible to anyone and anywhere in the world! Wouldn’t Shinran Sho-nin be happy and say that he could see that now? The Dharma that had taken centuries to travel from India, through China, Korea, and finally to reach him in Japan, is now being shared all over the world in an instant.

What Does Receiving Shinjin Mean?

By Rev. Yuji Sugahara
Oregon Buddhist Temple

I never expected our lives to turn into this and it’s been about two months since the home shelter began. How are you doing? I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy. I think most of us are missing physically being at a temple, attending services, chatting with friends, and monko or complaining about ministers. As many ministers and the temples are closing, you can do what I am doing online, I am sharing morning services every morning on Oregon Buddhist Temple’s YouTube channel and just began the series of sharing the “Letters of Rennyo” every morning.

Actually, it is really interesting to read the “Letters” in English since Rennyo Shinon’s YouTube channel and just started the series of sharing the “Letters of Rennyo” every morning.

What Does Receiving Shinjin Mean?

“Attainment of shinjin means understanding the Eighteenth Vow. Understanding this vow means understanding what “namo-amida-butsu” is. For within the one thought-moment of taking refuge — “namo” — there is aspiration for birth and directing of virtue. This, in other words, is the mind that Amida Tathāgata directs to ordinary beings.”

“The Letters of Rennyo: On Attainment of Shinjin”
**COVID-19’s Financial Impact on BCA, Temples**

By Gregg Sera, Director
Camping in the Sierras
Fresno Betsuin Buddhist Temple

This past year’s 53rd annual “Camping in the Sierras” began as a normal week with the usual fun activities, great food, getting close to nature and just plain relaxing and getting to know each other.

Even though the number of campers was low, we had one of the best camps ever — filled with camaraderie and fellowship. Maybe that was the secret to the success of the year’s success. The camp was held from July 28 to Aug. 4, 2019.

Since the group was small, we had the opportunity to come together each other on a closer and personal level not possible with larger groups. It seems that camp goes through a cycle of ups and downs in terms of attendance. It has been 30-plus years since we’ve had our last trip of a dozen campers and 20 years earlier, there were 16 when camp was created. In between those years we’ve had highs of 72, our maximum occupancy, and an average between 35 to 45 people. So, once again we come full circle.

Just as we’ve reached a full circle in attendance, camp has experienced another full circle “happening.” On Saturday, Aug. 3, 2019, we got a semi-surprise visit from Rev. Kodo Umezu, Bishop of BCA. It had been 30-plus years since Bishop Hirofumi Watanabe of BCA paid us a visit with then his Executive Assistant, Rev. Kodo Umezu.

Along with Bishop Umezu came his oldest daughter, Amy Umezu. She was a camper 25 years ago, served as a counselor and is now a Minister’s Assistant with the Gardena Buddhist Church.

We want to take this opportunity to acknowledge our special visitors. Bishop Umezu began his ministerial career at the Fresno Betsuin and continued on to Los Angeles Hompa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, Buddhist Churches of America staff, Buddhist Church of Oakland, Jodo Shinshu Center director and as Bishop.

Amy Umezu has achieved Tokudo status this past year studying in Japan. They spent the day with us and campers and counselors got to interact and get to know them. The Umezus held afternoon service and both offered short Dharma talks. So although the group may have been small, the campers were able to spend a day with Bishop Umezu. Another Bishop visit may not happen for another 30 plus years if history repeats itself — making this a very special camp year.

**Oxnard Buddhist Temple Celebrates Turning 90**

The Oxnard Buddhist Temple celebrated a joyous occasion — its 90th anniversary — on Oct. 12, 2019, a beautiful fall morning.

The temple was honored to have BCA Bishop Kodo Umezu officiate the service with Resident Minister Rev. Masanori Watanabe.

Messages addressing the anniversary theme, “In Gratitute,” were delivered by guest speakers, which included retired Rev. George Matsubayashi, in Japanese, and Rev. Fumio Ukish of the West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple in English.

After a commemorative photo, the Sangha gathered for a delicious bento luncheon in the social hall. Over the decades, families have come and gone. However, we were fortunate to have many family members of the founders in attendance. Dharmas students performed a play, Rev. Watanabe and Miko Shudo sang songs, “Nikkei Ondo” was danced to the singing of writer-composer Saburo Koga and Togen Daiko performed their favorite rousing pieces.

**‘American Bon’ Event Going Online**

“American Bon,” presented this past Sept. 1 at the conclusion of the 16th World Buddhist Women’s Convention in San Francisco, was a big hit — a joyful celebration that attracted about 500 people at the Yerba Buena Gardens Festival.

Because of the success of the event, the festival invited the American Bon Consortium to the planning group, back this year. But the coronavirus pandemic caused the cancellation of the event like so many other Obon at BCA temples this year.

However, the American Bon Consortium is planning to go ahead with a celebration — online.

The group wants to create videos consisting of the following: a brief short ministerial message, two or three videos of Obon dance instructions, videos of the demonstrated dances at past festivals, and closing remarks by a minister.

The group hopes that many Obon Odori teachers throughout the United States will volunteer to demonstrate their particular favorite or original dances.

“We see this as a complimentary feature to anything the temples may be planning,” the consortium stated. “It may also serve as a record of a historic moment when our longstanding Obon odori was suspended for the first time since it was first introduced in the United States by Rev. Yoshiro Iwanga 89 years ago.”

For more information, email americanbonconsortium@gmail.
Finding Strength Through Connections

By Rev. Dr. Kenneth Kenshin Tanaka
Orange County Buddhist Church

Hello, everyone. I hope this message finds you and your family, and temple Sangha members, doing well in an unprecedented time, facing a global pandemic.

The closure of educational institutions, businesses, border crossings, and places of worship has a direct impact on our quality of life. We have been asked to stay home, avoid gatherings, or shaking hands, and to maintain a spatial distance.

The shutdown impacts our spiritual well-being. We may feel anxious, confused, or isolated.

So, the question is, how is it even possible to care for our physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, occupational, environmental, and social well-being?

We can find strength in remembering that we are connected and interdependent. These days require resilience, the ability to sustain our purpose and sense of self and direction.

Despite the need to maintain physical distance, we can find strength in remembering that we are connected and interdependent. We can sustain our spiritual well-being by quietly sitting and the calling voice of Namo Amida Butsu from Amida Buddha.

We are all connected with each other, that is the burden of our duties to have us go through this unique time with which gives us hope, comfort, and safety.

Our founder, Shinran Shōnin, living through a couple of crises in times of epidemic, famine, and natural disasters teaches us that we can learn the Amida Buddha’s vow efficiency.

That is the power of resilience to get over adversity.

Shinran was totally dis- terressed after descending from Mount Hiei but learning the power of Pure Land Buddhism from Honen gave him hope and encouragement to stand up and continue work- ing on the path of attaining Buddhahood. He realized that the Buddha’s Immeasurable Light guides him to the deep spaciousness of the Nembutsu and Buddha’s Immeasurable Compassion never abandons him even when he was exiled to Echigo (present Niigata prefecture) from Kyoto because of the Nembutsu.

Spiritual resilience sup- ported by the Buddha’s wish leads us to satisfaction, nourishment, and fulfillment.

Building our spiritual health and resilience can enable us to encounter difficulties more effectively.

Even in these difficult times, remember that you are not alone! Smile. Let us say the Nembutsu, Namo Amida Butsu, together with the Buddha. May all beings be happy and seek to lighten the pain of others. I wish you all good health and hope that things will get better soon.

Namo Amida Butsu

Editor’s note: This is a reprint of a letter that Rev. Dr. Masumi Wundro, Resident Minister at the Orange County Buddhist Church, addressed in April. We are reprining this with her permission.

In These Uncertain Times, Make Room for Positivity, Hope

By Rev. Earl Ihe da
New York Buddhist Church

Take a deep breath, isn’t it great to be alive during uncertain times like this? Don’t get negativity and fear control you, make room for positivity and hope!

As human beings, we’re always looking to do things one way, but the coronavirus has taken us out of our comfort zones and pointed us in the direction of doing things in other ways, maybe even in ways we’ve never thought of before.

As human beings, there is always in us this inner desire to survive, to live, to explore different means of perceptions and connections.

If we give in to the darkness of negativity, then we’re trapped with doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear, but if we open ourselves up to positivity then we’re letting in the light that brings hope, and our minds become clearer and less doubt and fear.

Slowly by slowly, we notice more “aha” moments that change our perceptions and expand our personal abilities to see, through a newly found perspective.

Even though almost everyone is confined to their homes right now, people are breaking out of their shells and doing such things as phoning people, they haven’t spoken to in a long time, and shedding tears and having compassion for people they’ve never met.

There is an overwhelming sense of gratitude and deep feeling for everything they had taken for granted in the past, and in particular, experiencing gratitude for the heroic acts of kindness and selflessness that are taking place all over the world.

These renewed and new connections, this sense that we’re all in the same boat, have opened our hearts and minds to connect with everyone else. This awakening has helped us to realize that we truly are one with all things!

Sadly, thousands have already passed away and still more will come because of the virus. However, their deaths should not go in vain! Their passing should always make us think about what’s going on, and constantly remind us to be grateful and thankful for their lives, and our own. We should acknowledge them by openly saying “thank you.” Their passing will help future generations understand the actuality of this terrible illness, and how researchers and creatives can create a cure that will provide us with much needed optimism and hope.

In Buddhism, by reciting the Nembutsu, we express our deep thankfulness and a deep feeling of gratitude that we are not forsaken, and not alone. There is something out there that unconditionally accepts us for who and what we are, and enlightens our paths and our shared humanity toward all.

In a manner akin to the oxherding pictures used in Zen, these seven phases of a drowning sailor can help students understand the course of the “Amitabha Sutra.”

Several years ago, at a gathering of American Buddhists of various schools, I introduced myself as a Shin Buddhist to a Zen Buddhist sitting next to me.

Smiling, she responded, “So you’re the Christian Buddhist!” I was quite taken aback, but perhaps I shouldn’t have been. It is a view not uncommon among convert Buddhists in the United States, in particular those drawn to meditation traditions such as Vajrayana, vipassana, and of course, Zen.

I was about to address my Zen Buddhist neighbor’s misperception, but the program started and I lost my chance. Had I been able, I might have mentioned that, like Zen, Shin Buddhism is rooted in Mahayana scripture, teachings, and commentaries, in Sanskrit dating back to India in the first century of the common era.

I might have pointed out that Shin, like other traditions, gives particular emphasis to certain scriptural sources — in this case, those known as the three Pure Land sutras, namely, the “Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life,” the “Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life,” and the “Amitabha Sutra.”

And I might have said that Shin — again, like Zen and other schools — developed from its scriptural roots a distinct characteristic. Shin Buddhism’s distinctive center of gravity is teaching from its founder, Shinran (1173–1263), of a path of naturalness, or nen, for nonmonastic seekers.

As a child, I heard at my temple in California the Shin way described through a parable of a drowning sailor. Over the years, I have developed this parable into what I call the “Seven Phases of a Drowning Sailor.”

In a manner akin to the oxherding pictures used in Zen, these seven phases can help students understand the course of the Shin Buddhist path from beginning to fruition.

Phase 1: Boarding the Ship

A sailor boards a ship, which departs from the port of a tropical island. After several hours on the high seas, the sailor is the only one left with two other sailor buddies enjoying the magnificent sunset.

Boarding the ship symbolizes being born as a human being. According to Buddhism tradition, at birth beings are subject to the suffering, or dukkha, of the cycle of samsaric birth and death. On the occasion of his ordination as a monk, Shinran, who had lost both parents at a young age, captured his acute awareness of the evanescence and unpredictable nature of life and the suffering that comes with it:

“If you assume there will be tomorrow … The cherry blossoms may have scattered … In a tempest during the night.”

On the other hand, human birth is considered extremely rare and fortunate. It is fortunate because humans, of all those in the realms of the six destinies (heavenly beings, humans, titans, beasts, hungry ghosts, and hellish beings), have the best chance of awakening.

The rarity of human birth is likened to the sea turtle that surfaces only once every hundred years to poke its head exactly through a hole in a piece of wood that happens to be floating in the vast ocean. This outlook today serves to inspire Shin Buddhists, who, prior to taking refuge in the Three Treasures, recite:

“Hard is it to be born into human life, but now we are living it … If we do not awaken in this life, in which life will we be awakened?”

Next: Phase 2: Falling Off the Ship

Editor’s note: This article originally appeared in the quarterly magazine Trilogy: The Buddhist Review in its Spring 2019 issue. The illustrations were drawn specifically for the Wheel of Dharma.
Lessons in Fear

Continued from Page 1

justified; wasn’t he being so insensitive, endangering others with his spit? Looking back on this incident, I realized how I turned my phone into a weapon, and my rightousness the justification for my actions.

People do weird things when they’re scared. It’s all in the realm of ego defenses, which vary from denial and blaming to withdrawing from being involved to outward acts of bravery and heroism.

The novel coronavirus, as of this writing, has killed nearly 100,000 people in the United States, roughly a quarter of the total number of mortalities worldwide, as almost 5 million people in this planet have been identified stricken with this deadly disease.

Now we have begun to identify a COVID-19 induced systemic inflammatory syndrome in children, previously thought to be “mild.” No one is safe. No mask, no social distancing, no testing, no sophisticated equipment, sanitizers, or as yet to emerge vaccine, no government, no health care or financial institutions can guarantee safety.

In a crisis we all turn to the same instinctual responses: fight, flight, or freeze. This coronavirus pandemic has unmasked what most of us try to hide: our bonno, greed, anger and stupidity. What would we like to represent ourselves, but they are our futile attempts, whether conscious or unconscious, to gain control over something we don’t understand and don’t like. Underneath it all, we don’t know how to respond. And we don’t like looking weird.

We get mired in contradictions that have turned the wheel of samsara upside down. While crops and livestock being destroyed, people are eating hungry. While the United States is supposed to be one of the most powerful countries in the world, it has one of the most inept and inadequate pandemic responses in the planet. While we mourn and famous luxuriate in the boredom of their excesses, the isolated and disenfranchised despair in unemployment, food stamps, homelessness, prisons and dying alone, literally drowning in their own body fluids.

We are now struggling between living and livelihood, trying to find an impossible balance between social distancing and socially connecting. What divides us is what joins us to each other as well. All this confusion just adds to the anxiety, which in turn adds to the confusion.

What is the purpose of fear? Why are we biologically wired to be scared? How is it transforming us now? The first thought, of course, is self-preservation. Without fear, we wouldn’t have an impetus to be brave, adaptive, and resilient. But perhaps it ultimately serves one master, one purpose: Enlightenment.

What the Buddha taught about the truth of suffering came from his own awakening. Fear is at the core of our suffering, and forces us to look deep within ourselves. The horror inside is what is to be compared to someone else’s eyes. So too are our anger, greed, and ignorance. As fear divides us, it joins us to each other. It shows us who we are. As Jodo Shinshu Buddhists, we join the rest of the world, saying the Nembutsu. When we are gripped in fear, we are also grasped in Amida’s fearless compassion. Namo Amida Butsu.

Tech Summit

Continued from Page 1

Judy Konofal, Brad Iro, who works professionally in digital marketing and software development, began with a concise overview on digital marketing strategy. Referring to marketing tools SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound) and personal interviews, he discussed how helpful it is for temples to go through the process of creating a coordinated strategy for digital communications.

Mullins gave an overview of current BCA video efforts on YouTube and the BCA Connect e-newsletter. When posting content to YouTube, one factor Mullins asked temples to consider is how their content is targeted both internally to their Sanghas and externally to newcomers. He recommended that temples take the extra steps to write titles and content descriptions that would be useful to newcomers.

For e-news, temples have a ready made source of content with their newsletters. Transferring that content to electronic formats is an easy way to make newsletter articles go the extra mile, reaching those who prefer e-formats over printed and mailed materials.

Free Online Buddhist Study Class Offered

American Buddhism,” a free online Buddhist study class series from 5 to 7 p.m. Hawaii Standard Time on June 22-26. The course will offer noted scholar Rev. Dr. Duncan Ryuken Williams, author of “American Sangha,” a groundbreaking book published in 2019.

The study class series will cover the foundations of American Buddhism, Buddhism in Hawaii during World War II, religious freedom and American Buddhism during World War II, American Buddhism and ecology, and Buddhist social engagement in a series of five two-hour lectures over five nights.

The study class series will be available online through a link available at the Buddhist Study Center website, http://bchawaii.org. Pre-registration is not required and the lectures will be open to the public. Donations to the Buddhist Study Center are gratefully accepted in the spirit in which they are given. Detailed information and the full syllabus are available at http://bchawaii.org. For more information, please call the Buddhist Study Center at 808-973-6555.

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In addition, Rev. Harada creates video messages and his “Dharma” on “Dharma” on a regular basis every week — and both are shared on the BCA website and Facebook.

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not the mind of us believing in Amida Buddha’s working. Amida Buddha’s working to grasp and never abandon us comes to us first … the mind of entrusting attires in our mind … that is why we often hear the expression, “We receive Shinjin from Amida.”

Without the working, we are never able to establish Shinjin or Entrusting Heart in us. So, in gratitude for Amida’s benevolence and for the working to grasp and never abandon us, we recite Namo Amida Butsu.

Jodo Shinshu
Continued from Page 1

The Buddha taught us that ignorance and afflictions are the cause of our suffering. And Shinrin Shonin revealed to us of the truth of our self-centeredness that lurks at our core through the words, “we foolishly overlook the things possessed of afflictions.” Given these truths, isn’t it important that we share in the joys and pain present in such a difficult time? In Buddhism, we value the teaching of interdependence, which is the realization that “all things exist by being connected through the workings of causes and conditions. As a result, we cannot be found in such a ‘without any fixed substantial entity.’”

The spread of COVID-19 is not isolated to person-to-person contact. Consequently, we no longer feel relief but, instead, anxiety about our “human connectedness,” which was originally something that was highly cherished. Therefore, we must not come to regard our “human connectedness” negatively as something of great danger. Precisely because we are now facing this worldwide pandemic, we must become even more cognizant of the original meaning and the importance of our “human connectedness.”

What is crucially important at this time is for us to be guided by the Buddha’s wisdom and to work cooperatively together within the workings of Buddha’s great compassion. In so doing, we can reaffirm the importance of being alive and to bring an end to the spread of this disease. In short, let us do our part to the best of our abilities in order to regain our society, in which everyone can live with peace of mind.

April 14, 2020
Chiko Iwagami, Governor General, Jodo Shinsho Honshu-Ji

President’s Message
Continued from Page 3

videotaping events and services need to announce that they are still accepting donations from anyone who is financially able to donate.

If a temple is having a financial crisis and is looking at possibly closing, please contact me and Rev. Harada. These situations will be addressed on an individual basis and closure may be avoided if addressed early.

The BCA has a new Ad Hoc Committee on Financial Viability. Former BCA President Ken Tanishimo and John Arima will be looking at BCA’s long-range financial planning. Arima tells me that he will be looking at what BCA’s future expenditures will be and how we can meet those expenditures. Not unlike what every BCA temple is doing now, I will be letting BCA members know how we are progressing at making realistic changes to the current year’s budget.

In the meantime, the Executive Committee hopes that all BCA members stay safe.

Jodo Shinsho
Continued from Page 1

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先日、ある若い大学生から、ある学科のリポートのためにインタビューしたいとの電話がありました。簡単に電話だけのインタビューで済まそうとする学生は、個人的にあまり好きではありませんが、この度は、コロナウィルスで外出自粛の故、電話でのインタビューに快く同意をいたしました。その電話が、2時間近くのものになるとは、その時、予想もいたしませんでした。

彼女は、自分の宗教とは異なる宗教についてのレポートを書かなければならないとのことでした。他のキリスト宗派ではなく、以前から、興味のあった仏教を選んだとのことでした。そこで、早速、仏教の根本的教えについて質問して来ました。最初は、質疑応答は、スムーズにゆき、良かったのですが、しばらくすると、人間の善悪の行動について質問して来ました。私は、私なりに、仏教徒ではない彼女に、仏教の考えをわかってもらうように説明したのですが、彼女には、全く理解できなかったらしく、同じ質問を何度もしてきました。彼女は、全能の神の存在なしでは、何が正しくて、何が間違っているのか分からないのではないかと、攻めて来ました。彼女は、全ての存在は、神によって創造されたと言う考えの視点から言っているので、創造主のみが、真実であって、それを信じない人は間違いであると断言するのです。そして、あなたは、神の存在を信じているか、いないか、と何度も、何度も問いかけてくるのです。私から見たら、私の考えが間違っていても、それが、彼女にとって、何故そんなにも問題になるのか不思議に思えました。「私が、間違ってても、それでいいじゃないですか。あなたが、あなたの信ずる道を、一途に、誠実に生きたら、それでいいじゃないですか。私の間違った考えが、あなたの生きる道の妨げにでもなっているので ... の存在の有無が問題になっていても、私には、私が真実に生きていくうえで、それは、少しも問題になってないのです。ほっといてください。」と、心の中では思いましたが、彼女は、彼女なりに、真剣に話しているのだろうと思った私は、辛抱強く、彼女の質問に答え続けました。あまりにも、キリスト教の善悪を是として、私を説得しようとしている彼女に、私の堪忍袋の紐も切れそうになり、これはいけないと、何とか電話を切る口実を見つけ、やっと2時間近くのインタビューを終えることができました。四十年以上の開教使生活の中で、病院とか警察のチャプレンとして、長い間、他の宗教家と一緒におまいりの信仰を敬い、論争になったことは一度もありませんでした。それどころか、チャプレンの会議、又は、行事の際は、チャプレン一同、必ず仏教を含めるよう配慮してくれました。自分自身の信仰を確信している人は、他の信仰を、自身の信仰を侵す存在とは見ません。故に他をおそれたり、無視したり、排除をしたり、又は、自分の信仰に転化しようとは思わないのだと思います。故に、和をもって共存することによって、チャプレンとしての仕事を果たすことを、私達は心がけました。

ところが、彼女は違いました。彼女の信ずるところの宗教が絶対的な真実で、他は、すべて不実なのです。彼女の話を聞いていると、彼女に反する考えを打破することによって、彼女自身の宗教の正当化を証明しようとしているように思えて仕がらなかった。インタビュー中、何度も強く反論しようと思いましたが、嘆異抄の第十二章にある親鸞聖人のお言葉を思い出し、とどまりました。

親鸞聖人は、次のように申されます。『自分の信ずる教えこそが勝れている。他の人が信じている教えは劣っている』などと言うために、自分の宗旨と敵対する人もでてくるし、仏法の悪口を言うようなことも生じるのである。この様なことは、かえって自分で自分の信ずる教えを乱し、むしろ、自分の信ずる教えを否定することになるのではないか。中略一、『論争のあるところでは必ず色々な煩悩が起こるものである。智慧ある人は、そのような場から遠く離れるべきである』と教えた確かな証拠となる文章もあることである。親鸞聖人が仰せられる様に、論争の場においては、必ず、自己を、他の上に置き、他を自分の考えに屈伏させようとする心が生じます。それは、我執の増大でしかありません。我と我のぶつかり合いの場からは、怒り、不満、苦悩しか生じません。長かった電話のインタビューを終え、声には出さなかったけれど、私の心の中では、彼を勝れているという思いが常にあったことを振り返りました。表面では、物分りのいい人、忍耐強い人、又は、抱擁力のある人を演じていても、実際には、傲慢な人間であったことを、省みさせてくれたのが、このインタビューでした。誠に恥ずかしいことです。その時、心に浮かんだのが、正信偈の中の一句です。

ストックトン仏教会の本堂の前に、『大悲無倦常照我』と書いていた石碑が立っております。阿弥陀如来様の大いなる慈悲は、倦きることなく、常に私を照らしてくださると言う意味です。しかし、この行の前には、『煩悩障限雖不見』とあります。煩悩に眼をさえぎられて、阿弥陀如来の光明を見ることができないと言う意味です。私自身を省みると、まさに私を表した言葉です。長い間、布袍を着させていただいておりますが、煩悩に振り回されているのが私の毎日です。昔、『分かっちゃいるけど、やめられない』と言う流行語がありましたが、まさにその通りで、頭では、煩悩は苦の因であると分かっていても、気がついたときは、煩悩むき出しの生活をおくっており、その世界から逃れない、逃れようともしない人間、それが私そのものです。にもかかわらず、阿弥陀如来様の慈悲は、私を照らし続けているといわれるのです。慈悲とは、全てを慈しむ、あわれむ心のことを言います。「慈」は、衆生に楽を与えることを言い、『悲』は、苦を抜くことを言います。「楽」を与える時、それは、特定の人だけを対象とするのではなく、分け隔てなく、全ての衆生を対象とします。又、苦を抜くと言う『悲』は、その苦を、他人事に思う苦ではなく、自分 ... されるところに、謙虚な反省があり、他に対しても、寛容になれるのではないでしょうか。つまり、自分の不実に気づくことによって、他の違った考えを否定することにブレーキがかかります。そこで、他を素直に聞く耳を持ち、そこに本当の会話が生まれると思います。

私達は、多様の文化、宗教、価値観等の社会の中で生活しております。お互いが、その違いを認めず、自分の信ずるものを他に強制すれば、必ず争いが生じます。近来とみに分離が激しくなり、自分とは異なる文化、慣習、思想、政治意識、信仰に対しての寛容さが薄れてきているのをわたしが感じるだけでしょうか。真っ二つに分かれて、対立する社会。自分の考えを通すため、暴力に走る人も多々ある社会。こんな状態の社会に生活しているからこそ、お念仏の教えがいるのです。そのためには、まず、私から始めなければなりません。まず、自らの煩悩、阿弥陀如来様の慈悲を考えさせていただくのが大切なのではないでしょうか。

5月は母の日、6月は父の日をお祝いし、両親、または親の役割をしてくださっている方々に感謝します。浄土真宗の門信徒は、阿弥陀さまを親さまと呼んで親しみ尊敬してきました。報恩感謝の念仏を申す生活をいましましょう。
身近な存在は、私たちの心を強く揺さぶる。新しい形を模索し、世界中の人々とつながりを持ちましょう。