



Metta

October 2017

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In Honor of Rev. Dr. Alfred Bloom

1926-2017



Memories of Al

Rev. Richard Tennes

Editor's Note: This message was originally done for Dr. Alfred Bloom's funeral on September 2, 2017 at the Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Tannisho, Chapter 1

“Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida’s Vow, I shall realize birth in the Pure Land”: the moment you entrust yourself thus to the Vow, so that the mind set upon saying the nembutsu arises within you, you are immediately brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned.

Know that the Primal Vow of Amida makes no distinction between people young and old, good and evil; only *trusting heart* is essential. For it is the Vow to save the person whose karmic evil is deep and grave and whose blind passions abound.

Thus, for those who entrust themselves to the Primal Vow, no good acts are required, because no good surpasses the nembutsu. Nor need they despair of the evil they commit, for no evil can obstruct the working of Amida’s Primal Vow.

Thus were his words.

(Collected Works of Shinran, page 661)

When Rev. Dr. Alfred Bloom’s daughter Lily asked me to say a few words during his funeral, she asked me to read this particular passage from *Tannisho*, because it was his wish that these words be heard during the service. *Tannisho* was a very precious writing to Al, very much at the center of his spiritual life, so it is natural that he would want to share these words with us as we mourn his passing and reflect on the meaning of his life. I am very grateful to have this opportunity to read these words and fulfill his wish. He did so much for me over the years, helping me understand my own path and my work more clearly, always encouraging me to have confidence in my own ideas and aspirations, and in sharing his understanding of Shin Buddhism, guiding me to feel a sense of purpose and gratitude in my own life. He did this for many people, and he did it just by being himself. He was a person of great kindness, joy, and humility. He had a love of life that came through in his simple enjoyment of talking and sharing with others. He always had time for people.

(continued on page 4)

A Few Words From the Editor Jamie Lyn Itokazu

Hello!

I know that it has been a long while since you got a real newsletter, but things have been busy around here. Hopefully, we will be better in the future.

Rev. Sonam Bhutia of Nepal Hongwanji came to visit us for this year's Summer Session and in case you missed it all the days of Summer Session are available on our Youtube channel <BSC Hawaii>. I hope that you will be as inspired by the growth of Nepal Hongwanji as we are!

GoMonshu and his entourage came to visit for a quick stop in and the BSC Fellowship Club gave him club shirts as well as YESS Camp shirts. It was a really fun and short visit, which we hope to share more with in an upcoming issue.

This issue of the Metta will be dedicated to our Dharma friend and mentor Rev. Dr. Alfred Bloom who entered the Pureland at the end of August. We have had the pleasure of being associated with him since he was with the UH-Manoa Department of Religion. He is also the one who found the property that the BSC sits on. It was a pleasure to have him speak at Summer Session 2015 along with his Dharma friends Rev. Richard Tennes and Dexter Mar.

We hope that you will enjoy these reflections and memories of Rev. Dr. Alfred Bloom. He will truly be missed.

Also if you have not been receiving your newsletter by snail mail feel free to contact us and update your address. If you wish to receive your newsletter via email now, we also have the option available.

Namu Amida Butsu



The current logo from all the documents I have found was designed in 1992 under the direction of Rev. Yoshiaki Fujitani, when he was director of the Buddhist Study Center. The background of the black circle with the white stripes images a scene of the calm ocean and symbolize serene and tranquil state of mind created by the Buddhist teachings which is represented by the white lotus flower in the center of the logo.

This also symbolizes the BSC, located in Hawaii on the crossroads of the Western cultures and the Oriental cultures, which shares the better understanding of different cultures and contributes towards the peace of human beings and the world.

The white lotus flower symbolizes a stage that is associated with the state of bodhi; that of becoming awakened to the wonders of it all. When one reaches this state it is said that one has mental purity and has reached a state of spiritual perfection.

Director's Message Rev. Kevin Kuniyuki

With the passing of Rev. Dr. Alfred Bloom, we have lost the presence of a friend, mentor, and scholar who is an integral part of the history of Shin Buddhism in America. And, in fact, he was a key person in the founding and history of the Buddhist Study Center (BSC). The following is an excerpt from the Hawaii Kyodan Centennial publication: *A Grateful Past, A Promising future*:

Dr. Alfred Bloom of the University of Hawaii Religion Department know of Bishop's Imamura's vision of a study center near the UH-Manoa campus. Upon hearing the news of a sale of two nearby properties in early 1972, Bloom immediately called Imamura to tell him of the opportunity. Without delay, meetings were called and the leaders of the Hawaii Betsuin were persuaded to purchase the properties ...

Today the BSC has continued its work as a center for students and young adults. And is still a center for Buddhist education, still providing that informal, comfortable and safe environment to people to gather for fellowship and to learn and discuss Buddhism. Dr. Bloom has mentored a good many people who have passed through BSC as reflected by remembrances by Rev. Richard Tennes and Dexter Mar. There innumerable are the things he has done in support of the BSC and Buddhist Education. It is, therefore fitting that this Issue of Metta is dedicated to Dr. Alfred Bloom.



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Memories of Sensei Al Dexter Mar

My memories of Al started in his “emeritus” stage of life in his final decade of life. His many decades of a journey from Philadelphia to Japan to Boston to Oregon to Hawaii to California preceded the culmination of his journeys in his beloved Hawaii.

We first met, like many others, at a lecture by Rev. Tennes who asked Al to join in. At first, his teachings seemed way over my head, but his sincerity and expertise were undeniable. Meeting Al inspired me to dive into all of his many writings in books, essays and his website. Gradually I learned. How fortunate those circumstances created the opportunity to learn from a true Master of Shinran’s teachings and world religions.

Our relationship grew greatly around the 10th Annual Futaba Memorial lectures in 2009 via a support role that later developed into a leadership role. At “Al’s elbow” his influence grew and knowledge flowed. Planning with him on who to invite and what subjects might work best, provided many insights on thoughts about Shinran and Jodo Shinshu. Always evident was Al’s enthusiasm and passion to have Buddhist scholars and authors share their wisdom with Hawaii Hongwanji. His insistence on requiring the speaker have published books reflected his respect for the editorial process to craft solid works for thoughtful consideration. His “intellectual integrity” has guided me on the Shin Buddhist path. It’s been a wonderful opportunity to help Al and Dottie’s vision and perpetuate the Futaba Memorial Lectures.

We grew closer during his “hospice” years when he kept asking “why am I still here?” I’d always reply with “you’re here to teach us more!” And he would treat me to some “Shinran moments”. When he began feeling “useless”, Richard Tennes, Clyde Whitworth and I started “Al’s KO” group at Kailua Hongwanji temple on Thursdays each week. A steady group of students met each week for a year to discuss Shinran’s teachings and learn from sensei Bloom. The weekly “Al-fest” was a wonderful “one time, one moment” (Ichigo-Ichie) gathering held in the spirit that it might be the last time with Al. Al’s energy was always much higher after our 2 hours together, which included a tasty potluck lunch and an hour of discussion on Tannisho and Shinran’s thought. We semi-joked that Al was “channeling” Shinran for us, because we really felt we could hear Shinran’s deepest intentions when Al shared his 50+ year connection to Shinran Shonin.

As I accompanied Al on his final steps on the White Path, I did not sense any fear, only gratitude and love. When he moved from his Kailua home hospice care to St. Francis Hospice in Nuuanu, he was so happy to be able to help his family have more time for themselves. His purpose

for living was to help prepare them, and all of us, for our lives after his passing. Al was a true bodhisattva, always thinking of others. His final lessons were not about words but through his actions of grace, humility, and gratitude. In his final days, he most often just said, “I love you” to his family and visitors. We will always love you too, Al, and have you in our hearts, always.

Namo Amida Butsu.

The Hawaii Experience 1970-1986

Editor’s Note: This is passage from Dr. Bloom’s book A Life of Serendipity: Blown by the Wind of Amida’s Vow

I have already mentioned the awakening I myself experienced in showing the film Night and Fog, with its footage from the Nuremberg trials. This film was the only one available concerning Judaism at the time in our library. It was a telling presentation that left an indelible impression on me, especially when Rabbi Robert Schenkerman pointed out that not only were those Jews and other victims slaughtered in the camps victims but that we were all victims, because of the ongoing effects of those events on later generations. Such events changed our understanding of life and religion when we see that religion cannot always contain or overcome the hatred generated by prejudice, ignorance, and evil intentions. We are all susceptible to the forces that created the Holocaust, and they continue in world societies today, as we now witness on all sides in the Middle East and elsewhere.

In addition to participating in the conference on ecology soon after my arrival, our department, together with the Hawaii Buddhist Council, organized a group of seminars on Kamakura Buddhism in 1972 as many of the Buddhist sects were celebrating either the birth or death of the founder or the start of their movement. As a result of that program, several notable Buddhist teachers such as Taitesu Unno, a Shin scholar, and Shojun Bando came to Hawaii.

From funds remaining, I began to publish a small non-sectarian Buddhist newsletter, the Kalavinka, which refers to the bird in the PureLand that sings the Dharma. The purpose was to inform people about Buddhism and its activities in Hawaii. I received good cooperation from the Young Buddhist Association (YBA) director, the late Mr. Mineo Yamagata, Rev. Satoru Kawai of the Jodo (PureLand) sect mission, and several students such as Patty Fujitani (now Holmes) and Anne Pulfrey. This paper ran for some 4 or 5 years.

During the 70’s and 80’s I gave talks once a month on the Moiliili Temple’s White Way broadcast. Initially I focused on the Tannisho, a major text of the Shin tradition that contains an important collection of Shinran’s words.

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Al was a true teacher to many people, not only here, but all over the world. But he would never have accepted the idea that he was especially important or superior to anyone else. Of course he knew his own talents and the strengths of his mind; he had a phenomenal memory and great insight into Buddhist history and ideas, for one thing. He was a good scholar and writer and got better at these throughout his life. He was also a great communicator of ideas. But from a spiritual point of view, he knew he was just an ordinary flawed person, a “*bonbu*” like everyone else. But for those of us who knew and learned from him, who benefitted so much from his encouragement and acceptance, he was truly special *because* he was such a down-to-earth person, full of kindness, open to new ideas, always accepting of others, and respectful of the knowledge and experience that other people brought to the discussion. Al never “pulled rank” with anyone because he was a professor and scholar, but always listened to — and respected — everyone’s viewpoints. When I first met him here Hawaii Betsuin, I kept addressing him as “Dr. Bloom” so he quickly told me, “just call me ‘Al’”. He didn’t want any titles or the consciousness of status to come between him and other people. It was dialogue and learning that mattered to him. He cared about what was real.

And he sure loved to talk, to hold forth on his favorite subjects, especially Buddhism and mainly on the profundity and relevance of Shinran Shonin’s teachings. On that subject he could talk for hours. In fact, he was one of the first scholars in the Western Academic world to study Shinran and to bring awareness and appreciation of the Jodo Shinshu school of Buddhism to Western scholarship. But more than talking, he really enjoyed the company of others and was truly interested in people, in what they were doing, or trying, to do. And if you *were* trying to do something, Al would always have some good advice and encouragement to give — and often some help as well. He was fun to be with and enjoyed the simple pleasures of life. For example, having lunch with his friends at Zippy’s after Sunday Service at the Hawaii Betsuin, where there would always be wonderful conversation on all kinds of subjects. Al would usually order his favorite Zippy’s meal of fried eggs, french fries, and diet Pepsi! He ordered that so many times, I think Zippy’s should make this one of their regular menu items and call it the “Bloom Special”!

He was a warm and welcoming person, inviting my wife and I and many of his other friends, to the family holiday celebrations at his home in Kailua, where we were welcomed by his equally warm family, his wife Dotty, his daughter Lily and her husband Sam, and his family. We met his son Ross there too. We always felt so welcome and at home there.

What was always central to Al was the Dharma, the Bud-

dha’s teaching. In fact, his was a Life of Dharma and it was in his life, even more than in his words, that the Light of Dharma shone on everyone who came to know him, in one way or another.

Even though Al did not want a Eulogy, I hope he won’t mind if I say a little about his life. Alfred Bloom was born in Philadelphia in 1926. He was a child of the Great Depression and came to adulthood in the cataclysm of World War II. In the war, he served in the army, but he wasn’t called on to fight any battles. Instead, he was assigned to an intelligence unit where he was trained in Japanese language. This was one of the first of what he called the “serendipitous” events of his life, which eventually lead him to encounter Buddhism and the teachings of Shinran Shonin. Had it not been for that, his life probably would have developed in quite a different direction. Religiously, he came from a Jewish background, but was raised a Christian. Due to the “accident” of serving as a translator in Occupied Japan, Al encountered the concept of Amida Buddha while doing missionary work, giving a Christian sermon! This was a story which he told many times, and it was the beginning of a great spiritual journey for him. Eventually, having encountered Buddhism and the teachings of Shinran, his religious ideas blossomed in the years that followed, his understanding grew, and his perspective opened to a wider world.

Al flourished intellectually and spiritually during the 1960’s and 70’s, a time when so many people were beginning to question the values of Western society. Actually, Al wasn’t of the 60’s “youth generation,” he wasn’t a baby boomer, (in fact he was already part of what was then called the “older” generation), but from the stories I have heard, this period was an especially fruitful time for him, with its spirit of questioning and experimentation, its emphasis on social justice and peace, the synthesis of many new ideas, and the thirst for positive and sometimes revolutionary change. Throughout the years that followed, his involvement in — and commitment to — Shin Buddhism grew. He became very active with Honpa Hongwanji here in Hawaii. After his years as a professor at University of Hawaii, he served as Dean of the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, before retiring back here in Hawaii. In 1990 he became an ordained Hongwanji minister. Throughout this journey, his characteristic of being open to change and new ideas was always evident. Al’s thinking was always relevant, he was always looking for ways to show that the spiritual teachings of Buddhism mattered, and that they made a difference in how we lived our lives. For those for whom Buddhism was a family legacy, his talks and writings often served to awaken them to the untold treasure of the tradition they had received and reminded them to take it seriously, as something that really mattered. He reminded them that their spiritual heritage was not just about funerals, memorial services, and cultural traditions.

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Al was always a questioning person, interested in everything. For him Buddhism was a Path of Freedom, because it teaches us to think critically, to always seek understanding, and never to accept authority blindly. He often quoted the words of his friend and teacher, the late Professor Futaba Kenko of Ryukoku University, who told him “Shinran is not Shinshu.” I think this statement was for him an important point of reference, a reminder that one should always go back to the source of the teaching, the source of Wisdom, and never simply accept the dictates of institutions or orthodoxies — no matter how venerable or well intentioned — without thought and self-reflection. Al often referred to Shinran’s admonition at the end of Chapter Two of *Tannisho*, which said, “It’s up to you, follow your own dictates.” Al encouraged everyone to think for themselves because his own deep trusting faith assured him that we are all being guided, throughout our lives, by the Boundless Compassion and Wisdom that is at the root of all existence, and that each person’s own unique path is constantly being transformed into the “right path” by that Measureless Reality. Perhaps the reason that Al wanted Chapter One of *Tannisho* read at his funeral was to remind each of us to go forward and live our lives with confidence, faith, and gratitude. The Boundless Compassion, which he felt embraced by, embraces all of us, not because we are good, not *in spite of* our limitations and faults, but *because* we are imperfect and so much in need of help. That’s what compassion really means. And because of what Al learned from Shinran, he was able to encourage and support countless other people.

We will always remember Al Bloom as a person of wisdom, kindness, and generosity, full of humor and the love of life. He was deeply devoted to his family and had great appreciation for their loving support and acceptance of the demands his journey placed on them. He had great love for his friends. His sharing of Shin Buddhist teachings has been a blessing to so many of us! He showed us how relevant Buddhism is and how vital and important Shinran’s teachings are to the modern world. We are so fortunate to have had Rev. Dr. Alfred Bloom as part of our lives, and as we go forward, I think we will all continue to learn and benefit from his as his legacy will remain as a blessing to all of us.

Thank you Al! Namo Amida Butsu.



Strategies for Modern Living

Alfred Bloom

Editor’s Note: This is a passage from Dr. Bloom’s book Strategies for Modern Living: a commentary with the text of the Tannisho.

The basis of Shinran’s appeal to authority rests on the awareness of gratitude to the Buddha and to one’s teacher. It is the authority of gratitude. In charting one’s attitudes and actions, one must be aware of the debt of gratitude one owes to those who have lightened his path, who have brought the necessary message of emancipation and freedom. Thus Shinran notes that though he does not have formal control over his disciples— that in effect he has no disciples, they turn in must consider their responsibilities to the teaching as they become aware of Amida’s Vow of compassion and its meaning for their lives. Their awareness of the Vow should inspire gratitude in them and awaken their responsibility to the teaching.

This is the way of freedom and responsibility which Shinran attempted to instill in his followers. While the early community faced a multitude of issues and problems which were not easy to solve, there was a guide, a standard, for approaching those problems. It is this which Yuien-bo presents in the *Tannisho*. Yet, it is remarkable that the text is singularly lacking in demands for conformity and dogmatism.

One may ask, however, why such differences arose in the first place. Shinran’s teaching was plain. We can observe from the history of religion that this has been the fate of the creative and inspiring spiritual vision. The thought and experience of creative religious sages is like a multifaceted diamond. Depending on the angle, the sparkle comes from a different facet. Shinran was a subtle religious thinker, and his thought contains many paradoxes which he admitted himself. An example is his declaration in the *Tannisho*, chapter three, that it is easier for an evil man to be saved than a good man. He notes that this is quite contrary to the usual way of thought which gives the good person an advantage over the evil person in gaining salvation. However, this usual way of thought was contrary to the intention of Amida’s Vow. For Shinran, religion was not a moralistic or competitive activity by which one may show his superiority over others. Shinran’s affirmation of the evil person and assurance of his salvation led some thoughtless and ego-centered persons to believe they could do evil with impunity. Though they wished to benefit from the emancipation and freedom offered in Amida’s Vow, they neglected their responsibility to others by following their own egoistic impulses. It is such issues as these that are in the background of Yuien-bo’s concern and which lead him to place great stress on the standard set by the teacher, Shinran, and on the responsibility believers have to the faith and to those who will receive it in later generations.



ZEN MEDITATION CLASSES

“Zazen, or sitting meditation, is the heart of Zen practice. The Art of Zazen is just sitting, that is, suspending all judgmental thinking and letting words, ideas, images, and thoughts pass by, without getting involved in them.”

AVAILABLE AT TWO LOCATIONS

When: Tuesdays from 6:00pm to 7:00pm

Effective 4/18/2017

Where: Buddhist Study Center

Address: 1436 University Avenue

Lead Instructor: Colbert Matsumoto

When: Saturdays from 8:00am to 9:00am

Where: Japanese Cultural Center,
Kenshikan Dojo (Ground Floor)

Address: 2454 South Beretania Street

Lead Instructors: Colbert Matsumoto &
Richard Lim

Appropriate Attire: Loose sweat pants & t-shirt (no shorts & tank tops);
no jewelry or fragrances

Admission: Free

Newcomers: Must arrive 15 minutes early

For more information, contact:

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Honolulu, HI 96813

Email: info.institutetzenstudies@gmail.com or
Contact Ray at (808) 358-1021

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We gratefully welcome memorial donations and donations in all forms. We are now on Paypal! There is a link on our website.
As of January 2013, Please make all checks payable to the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. Thank You.

FOR METTA

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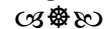
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The talks continued for about two years and became the first book published by the Buddhist Study Center Press. It was later published in Japanese in 1987. This text is followed by a volume on the *Shoshinge* (The hymms of True Faith; 1986),an important text recited daily by Shin Buddhist followers and on important ritual occasions. I used the same format for about a year. I was helped in those efforts by Mr. Toshmasa Tando and Ms Donna Higashi, who became my good friends.

In the course of the Vietnam War, I was questioned by a leading Buddhist activist why traditional Buddhists, and notably the Hongwanji, were not more active in the anti-war campaign? The roots of this problem lie in the history of Buddhist traditions in East Asia, particularly those dominated and supported by despotic governments, which rendered the teachings more passive in society. In Hawaii at that time, little discussion took place in the Hongwanji concerning the issue, nor was any resolution presented at the annual legislative assembly. When one takes into consideration the pride

of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Battalion that had fought so bravely in Europe in WWII as a demonstration of loyalty to the nation and the fact that many people in Hawaii work for the government, the reluctance to question the government's policies is understandable. Also, it was a time when the Cold War was still hot.

Together with some young people and a minister at the Betsuin, we formed the Ad Hoc Committee of Buddhists Against the War in Vietnam and handed out leaflets at the entrance of Hickam Air Base as did Catholic Action and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. The effort was short-lived when it became known that a Hongwanji minister was involved, and some members reacted negatively. Instead, I met with the Buddhist Peace Fellowship to give out the leaflets.



If you would like to read more of Dr. Bloom's books you can purchase them at the American Buddhist Study Center or the Honpa Hongwanji Mission bookstore.

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Contributors Rev. Richard Tennes
 Dexter Mar
 Rev. Dr. Alfred Bloom

UPCOMING EVENTS

Ministers' Lay Assistant Retreat	Oct. 13-15
BSCFC Haunted House	Oct. 20-21
Buddhist Discussion Group	Oct. 23
Zen Meditation	Oct. 24
Shakuhachi with Rev. Thomas Okano	Oct. 25
Shakuhachi with Rev. Thomas Okano	Oct. 26
ABC's of Buddhism	Oct. 26
Game Night	Oct. 27
Zen Meditation	Oct. 31
Shakuhachi with Rev. Thomas Okano	Nov. 1
Shakuhachi with Rev. Thomas Okano	Nov. 2
ABC's of Buddhism	Nov. 2
Zen Meditation	Nov. 7

