



# Metta

Autumn 2019

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## Song of Life

Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Wondra

Full-time Minister, Orange County Buddhist Church



Living in the Southern California, we know about traffic jams. When my 40 minutes driving commute is smooth, I am super lucky! During the commute, I enjoy listening to CD music and think about the idea of next Dharma message and plan the day, or reflect my day on the way home. Just recently I listened to the song titled The Song of Life, composed and sung by Takeuchi Mariya. She became very popular after I left Japan in 1981, and even now she is one of the best J-pop singers, and she is married to the singer songwriter Yamashita Tatsuro. Let me share her song which translated by Wayne Yokoyama, my long-time Dharma friend and translation partner. (Thanks, Wayne!)

The song of life (Inochi no Uta)

Lyrics by Takeuchi Mariya

Well, here we are, living the same old ho-hum life, day after day.

But when I stop to ask myself, "Hey, what's it all about?" —

I find myself experiencing this warm feeling rising up deep within

As I think of all the really wonderful people I've met up to now.

But living here in this distant corner of our rocky star, the real miracle's my having met you.

Meeting you is a miracle I treasure more than any diamond or pearl I could ever have.

In this life of mine there were times I cried my eyes out, when I just gave up completely.

At those times I'd think of you by my side. You were always there for me when I needed you.

I'd remember the good old days when we would cuddle up together

And watch the sun set in our old hometown as we sang the song of life.

Ever notice how the really important things in life are always hidden from us?

Even on the most uneventful day there's an irreplaceable sense of joy to be found.

There comes a time when everyone has to say Sayonara and Bye-bye

To this rocky star we're living on.

Let it be a reminder to us that this life of ours is constantly flowing on.

Born into this world where we grew up,

There were all the good times we've had with everyone we've met. And after our life here, we now

have to say thanks and bid a fond farewell.

Thank you, dear Life, for everything and a fond farewell to you, we say, as we sing the song of life.

Original in Japanese:

Ikiteyukukoto-imi toi-kakeru-sono-tabini mune-wo-yokorigu itoshii-hitobitono-atatakasa

Kono-hoshino-katasumide meguri-aeta-kisekiwa donna-hoseki-yorimo taisetsuna-

takaramono

Nakitai-himo-aru zetsuboni-nageku-himo sonna-toki-sobani-ite yorisou-anatano-kage

(Continued on page 2)

**Song of Life**  
Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Wondra

*(Continued from page 1)*

Futaride-utaeba Nasukashiku-yomigaeru furusatono-yuyakeno yasashii-ano-nukumori

Hontoni-daijina-monowa kakurete-mienai Sasayaka-sugiru-hibino-nakani kakegaenai-yorokobiga-aru

Itsukawa-daredemo kono-hoshini-sayonarawo surutokiga-kurukedomo inochiwa-tsunagarete-yuku

Umaretekita-koto sodatete-moraetakoto deattakoto warattakoto

Sono-subeteni-arigato kono-inochini-arigato

生きてゆくことの意味 問いかけるそのたびに 胸をよぎる 愛しい人々のあたたかさ

この星の片隅で めぐり会えた奇跡は どんな宝石よりも たいせつな宝物

泣きたい日もある 絶望に嘆く日も そんな時そばにいて 寄り添うあなたの影

二人で歌えば 懐かしくよみがえる ふるさとの夕焼けの 優しいあのぬくもり

本当にだいじなものは 隠れて見えない ささやかすぎる日々の中に かけがえない喜びがある

いつかは誰でも この星にさよならを する時が来るけれど 命は継がれてゆく

生まれてきたこと 育ててもらえたこと 出会ったこと 笑ったこと

そのすべてにありがとう この命にありがとう

You can hear this song in Japanese on YouTube. It expresses the preciousness of life and deep gratitude to have met families and friends in this life. Don't we stop and ask ourselves at least one time in life, "What is my life? What is the meaning to live?" Our great teacher, Shinran, also thought about this question during the 12th century in Japan. He realized the inconceivable working from the Tathagata Amida to guide him to the superior nirvana. The way to get there is to have the mutual trust with the Amida Buddha by hearing and receiving the Buddha's sincere and pure vows to get spiritually liberated. Jodoshinshu-Shin Buddhism teaches us how we can live fully in this one-time life, even in adverse situation, and you would deeply accept it and turn it around in your life. That is the wisdom that we human beings can learn from Buddha-Dharma.

Namo 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.

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**Excerpt from Hongwanji Shimpo November 1, 2017**

**Rev. Michio (Ichido) Tokunaga**  
**Dean, House of Hongwanji Academicians**

**The Way that Transcends Exclusion**

Obstructions of karmic evil turn into virtues;  
 It is like the relation of ice and water:  
 The more the ice, the more the water;  
 The more the obstructions, the more the virtues.  
 (Collected Works of Shinran, Vol. I, p. 371)

**Finding fault with others in today's world**

The above wasan is found in the Hymns of the Pure Land Masters in the section 'Hymns on Master Tanluan.'

The working of Amida's great compassion is unhindered, and of course our karmic evil does not prevent it from reaching us. To the contrary, our karmic evil is what makes us everyday people, the very aim and object of the Buddha's salvific work. If our karmic evil were compared to ice, for example, it goes without saying that water which forms when the ice melts is the salvific virtue of the working of Amida's Primal Vow.

In today's world, however, people appear to no longer have a sense of guilt or are bothered by a guilty conscience, so everyone seems to not understand or have forgotten the meaning of karmic evil. Many advocate "good" and "justice," but often it is used merely to evaluate and criticize others, and that same standard is never used on oneself.

More precisely, in calling for "good" and "justice" to prevail, this standard is aimed at others to pass judgment on them and is not used when looking at one's own actions. When this is viewed from the opposite meaning of "evil" and "wrong-doing/injustice," it is often applied to remove others and exclude them from the society where we belong.

**Awakening to one's "obstructions"**

In this wasan, Shinran explains that obstructions are none other than one's own evil, self-centered acts and self-promoting desires (bonno), and they make it impossible for us to attain liberation and enlightenment on our own. He further states that these obstructions are not "injustices" and "wrong-doing" as is often mistakenly understood by many in the world.

Put another way, illuminated by the light of Amida's great compassion, I am made aware of my true being, that I possess evil acts and desires.

*(Continued on page 5)*

## The Plight of Women in a Patriarchal Society

The plight of women in a patriarchal society is a serious matter even now. Buddhism has long recognized it but has not always been able to do anything to remedy it. In the Nirvana Sutra there is the striking parable of the destitute woman:

“In addition, Mañjuśrī, consider the parable of a destitute woman with no place to stay and no one to take care of her, who also suffers from illness and is racked with hunger and thirst. Roaming about begging, she ends up staying in a house belonging to someone else. There she gives birth to a child but when the master of the house [returns], he throws her out, forcing her to go away. So not long after giving birth she must carry her newborn in hopes of reaching another land. On the road she encounters a bad storm, bitter cold, and is stung by a host of mosquitoes, horseflies, and bees, and bitten by poisonous insects as well. Her journey brings her to the Ganges River, which she attempts to cross while holding her infant. [Trying to get her child to the other side,] no matter how swift the current, she will not let go; but in the end mother and child both drown. This woman creates extraordinary merit in her compassion [toward her child], and after her life ends she is reborn in a Brahmā heaven.” ... (43–44) Trans. Mark L. Blum, BDK series

Here, birth in Brahmā Heaven is the only consolation for woman who suffers the indignities of life in a harsh patriarchal world. This reflects the prevailing patriarchal view of the society in which the sutra is making its appeal. Buddhism points out the problem, but it has no choice except to serve the society in which it appears.

In the story of Oshin, the serialized tv drama written by Hashida Sugako (now showing in Hawaii), we see Japan transition from a patriarchal society to a more democratic one. At first Oshin lives in a world where it was common practice for poor families to sell their daughters into prostitution. Even in Imperial Japan it was the custom for powerful men to father children with several women none of whom were their wives as we understand it today. It was not until the early twentieth century that this practice changed.

In one scene Oshin meets her sister who was working at a textile mill. Textiles was an important part of Japan’s industrialization. Factories such as the Tomioka Silk Mill near Yokohama and the Japan cotton mills of Osaka boosted Japan’s status in the world. Women manned the looms and often lived in unsanitary communal housing where disease spread easily. Oshin’s sister stricken with pneumonia came home to die.

Only women fortunate enough to have an education could possibly escape the fate of being born a woman in a man’s world. This is in part the significance of the Buddhist women’s university started by the efforts of Kujo Takeko and her sister in law Kazuko.

The story of Oshin is based on the life of a real person. Her family is related to the Yaohan store that used to be in Honolulu. But the real treasure is the story of her life reflected in the epic struggle of Oshin to marry the man she loves.

Although I have nowhere seen it explained this way, my guess is that Honen came across the promise of a new world order in the sutra passage on Faith, Joy, and Love. Up to that time “love” had been interpreted negatively by male monastics who regarded women as spiritually inferior. In those days Mount Hiei, the monastic center where he lived, was off limits to women. It is only in this brave, new version of the Larger Sutra (T310 (5)) that he saw the bud of a brave, new world where Love with respect to women was to be positively affirmed.

“Let them awaken one moment’s thought  
of pure Faith, of irrepressible Joy, of Love’s delight (airaku).”

Nowhere does he quote it, but I would assert that the Faith, Joy, and Love passage (T310.97b) is what made Honen descend the Mountain. It signaled the change from the traditional Buddhist model of male monasticism to a more truly democratic one that embraced both men and women on equal terms.

The United States inclusive of Hawaii has long been a champion of women’s rights ever since the Boston women’s la-

*(Continued on page 5)*

*(Continued from page 3)*

However, rather than falling into the depths of despair and hopelessness, the feeling of the greatest joy embraces me because I come to realize that since my being is an amalgamation of evil acts and desires, I am none other than the very object of the Buddha's salvific working. The larger the mass of ice, the greater the runoff of water there is when it melts. Likewise, the more obstructions we possess, the more the virtues of great compassion we receive from the Tathagata.

Shinran extensively learned from Master Tanluan's explanation of Amida's great compassion. We, who are mere ordinary beings, the reason for receiving the Tathagata's salvific working is not for removing obstructions we possess. To the contrary, since we possess various obstructions, we become the aim and object of Amida's concern, and there is no where we may flee and hide.

It seems that in today's world, the advocacy of "good" and "justice" is being used merely as a standard for excluding and removing individuals from society. However, this wasan reveals and clarifies for us the limitations of this kind of understanding and indicates to us the way that transcends it.

Translation by Gene Sekiya

*(Continued from page 4)*

bor union movements of the 1860s. Activists recognized the plight of women in a patriarchal society and tried to create a more democratic society. First, equal pay for equal work. In postwar Japan this spills over in the guarantee of women's rights clause written into the new Japanese constitution drafted by the Americans. You can be sure that not everyone in Japan approved of that clause. Many people against it wanted to preserve the old patriarchal system of Imperial Japan. But the historic clause is to be applauded in the ongoing struggle for women's rights.

Shinran took up the banner of Faith, Joy, and Love when he married Eshinni—with Honen's blessings. Like Oshin, Eshinni too must have wanted to marry the man she loved. This episode is not found in the fourteenth century Life of Shinran. But in my fictional account of his life, the real Life of Shinran begins at this point where he meets Eshinni and falls in love. How is it that by sheer chance he meets the love of his life? It is totally mysterious. . But Honen approves of their love saying to them it is all the working of Other Power. Honen thus entrusts them with the mission of Faith, Joy, and Love he set out on years ago when he first descended the Mountain. . / *W. S. Yokoyama, Kyoto*

### **More on The Faith, Joy, and Love Passage**

"Let them awaken one moment's thought  
of pure Faith, of irrepressible Joy,  
of Love's delight." —

There is a sparkle to these words that would not be out of place in Shakespeare. Most of you will look at it and say, never heard of it. Me too—never heard of it—not until quite recently. In fact we come across them in a sutra that Shinran quotes late in life. The fact that he waited until late in life and only quotes it once means they must have been highly significant to him.

So what is going on here, we ask. This is only my guess, but most likely Shinran heard these words from his teacher Honen. At one point Shinran was standing at a major crossroads in his life. Either he was going to go up or go down into the flames of Hell. Honen had these words of advice for him. It was an affirmation of love that Shinran did not expect to hear from a Tendai monk.

Typically monastics deny any form of love of a sensual nature. Monks avoid association with women as an obstacle to spiritual life. The Mountain, Mount Hiei, was off limits to women in their day. The usual Larger Sutra we look at still has

*(Continued on page 6)*

## The Awesome Sangha

A gift of the Buddha sublime,  
This Sangha, Amida's great gift,  
Leads to Salvation all beings adrift  
In samsaric seas since endless time.

My Dharma friends here are a treasure  
Gifted me by Amida's Great Love;  
From His Lotus Seat reigning above  
He blesses us all without measure.

The Sangha is a great Jewel,  
Along with the Buddha and Dharma,  
Leading us through the thickets of karma,  
The way out of life's trials cruel.

This timeless gift is a true blessing  
The community of our Sangha true;  
Its vision of the Pure Land, its view  
Offers guidance, our problems addressing.

Together we listen deeply, and,  
Surrendering to Amida's Other Power,  
In His presence we neither tremble nor cower  
As He takes us with Love by His Hand.

I thank Amida, my Savior and Lord,  
This great Shinjin from Him I've acquired  
Through His Primal Vow, and I abide  
Praising Him with many a joyful word!

Namu Amida Butsu  
Namu Amida Butsu  
Namu Amida Butsu

Thank You, Amida Buddha  
Thank You, Amida Buddha  
Thank You, Amida Buddha

Gassho,  
Richard St. Clair  
(Shaku Egen)

*(Continued from page 5)*

a somewhat monastic outlook on life. But in the meantime, as centuries pass, the Sutra undergoes an evolution. In the early eight century a new version of it comes out. This is where we find the above quote.

As far as I know Honen never quotes that sutra. He seems to base his teaching entirely on Shandao who died long before the new sutra appeared. But at some point Honen read the study by Wang Rixiu of Longshu, due west of Shanghai. He mentions the title in his Senchakushu. It incorporated elements of the new sutra, in effect going beyond Shandao. I would assert it was that relatively new study that gave Honen the courage to abandon monastic life. Leaving Mount Hiei he descended into the world where he embraced ordinary life although he remained a Tendai monk his entire life.

We all know the emphasis Pure Land Buddhism makes on going to Pure Land. The Larger Sutra is unique in that it also presents a return phase, of Descent into the world, genso. I think this is what Shinran sees as the real emphasis in the Larger Sutra. All 48 vows, or at least many of them, describe the scenario that unfolds when the Buddha make their Descent into the world. The above quote also describes that scene.

It is difficult to say this world is the Pure Land. That is an inverted view, as if looking through the wrong end of the telescope. But in these words we see a vision of a world where we want to be, a world of Faith, Joy, and Love. It is a world where women are equally respected as the source of love, wisdom, and spirituality. I think this is what Shinran must have seen in the eyes and arms of Eshinni. These words are a confession of that love as he—they—descended into the world, their world, the world they would create.

Love made all the difference to him, to the two of them. We do not hear this aspect of the story, everything being calibrated to the myth of the great man. But it is also clear that Honen blessed their decision to marry. This rare quotation from the new version of the sutra affirms their love. Love is also the cornerstone of the new Shinshu religious culture that would develop over the years.

There is much more to our new version of the old story we all know. But that will have to wait for another occasion.

Technical data: The new Tang version of the Sutra on Immeasurable Life (in T310 (5)) was translated by Bodhiruci (575–727) circa 710. Wang Rixiu (d. 1173) wrote the Longshu Pure Land study (T1970) read by Honen (1133–1212).

*/ W. S. Yokoyama, Kyoto*

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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. Please make all checks payable to the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. Thank You.

### Writing in the Sand

I stand on the beach and gaze upon the waves breaking on the shore.

The waves roll in and out fixed intervals without a moment's pause. The sea rocks itself in nature's cradle. In the whispering voice of the water as it touches the shore. We can hear the stirring of our own hearts.

A sand castle built on the shore is completely engulfed by a wave. It recedes, melting the tower. Soon all signs of the castle have been erased.

Human inspiration, effort, and fame are like letters written continuously in the sand. And all of those, too, will surely disappear. Meanwhile, the waves continue their playful game of washing everything away and no one ever tires of it.

Lady Takeko Kujo  
From *Leaves of my Heart* page 58  
Translated by W. S. Yokoyama

### The Golden Chain of Love

I am a link in Amida Buddha's Golden Chain of Love that stretches around the world. I must keep my link bright and strong.

I will try to be kind and gentle to every living thing and protect all who are weaker than myself.

I will try to think pure and beautiful thoughts, and to say pure and beautiful words, and to do pure and beautiful deeds, knowing that on what I do now depends not only my happiness or unhappiness, but also that of others.

May every link in Amida Buddha's Golden Chain of Love become bright and strong and may we all attain Perfect Peace.



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## Upcoming Events

Meditation with Pat Jichaku: Tuesdays at 11:30 AM

Chozenji Zen Meditation: Tuesdays at 5:30 PM

BSC Shakuhachi Club: Tuesdays, Wednesdays and  
Thursdays

Yoga with Lisa Yanagi: Wednesdays at 5 PM

Buddhist Discussion Group: Sep. 23, Oct. 21, Oct.  
28 at 11 AM

Minister's Lay Assistant Retreat: Oct. 11-13

BSC Fellowship Club Haunted House: Oct. 25-26

