



WHEEL OF DHARMA

Official Publication of the Buddhist Churches of America

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Bonbu Stories members gather at Senshin Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles in 2023. They created the BCA gatha “Lantern Song,” which was commissioned by the BCA Music Bon Odori Taiko Subcommittee to honor the BCA’s 125th anniversary in 2024. Shown, from left, are: Vicky Zhang, Miko Shudo, Miharū Okamura, Sydney Shiroyama and Kendall Tani. (Courtesy of Luke Uyeda)

‘Lantern Song’ Stirs Memories, Lessons

Bonbu Stories Member Shares Experiences With Grief, New Gatha’s Impact

Editor’s note: Kendall Tani, a Bonbu Stories member, has written the following article about her experiences with grief, loss, and the impact of the new BCA gatha “Lantern Song,” which Bonbu Stories performed at Obon festivals last year. Bonbu Stories is scheduled to perform this year at BCA temples and churches.

By Kendall Tani

Imagine: You’re sitting at the kitchen table, belly and heart equally warm and full after eating a delicious home-cooked meal for yourself and your loved ones,

FYI

To view Bonbu Stories performing “Lantern Song,” go to: bit.ly/4izBKR0

and it’s time to get the leftovers packed and the dishes cleaned up.

You look at the leftovers in the pot, estimating just how much it is. But ladle by ladle, your doubt grows inverse to the quickly diminishing fillable space. Of course — the dish is not big enough. How could it have ever been?

So, you’re forced to fit the overflow in multiple smaller containers, much to your chagrin.

For me, I’ve come to think of this scenario as an analogy for my grief. Grief is a meal born of multiple collaborators — of community, of context, of time, and of love. It has been nourishing in its capacity to bring me closer to my loved ones and community, and overwhelming when it has flooded its vessels.

There were times where I consumed it solely for sustenance and not for taste, and other times where I indulged myself. At times, I pushed it to the back of my mind and allowed it to fester and mold over until I could no longer avoid

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MINISTER’S MESSAGE

Shinran’s Saying Came to My Mind in LA Wildfires

By Rev. Koho Takata

West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple



Rev. Koho Takata

The wildfires that broke out on Jan. 7 had a significant impact on many residents of Los Angeles. First and foremost, I want to express my deepest condolences to those who lost their lives in this tragedy, as well as my heartfelt concern

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BCA Town Hall Goes Virtual, Worldwide

By Jon Kawamoto

Wheel of Dharma Editor

In an unprecedented event, the BCA held a town hall meeting that reached beyond the temples and churches — to households and residents around the world.

The “A Promise Shared” town hall was part of the opening week of the BCA’s National Council Meeting (NCM), and was held on Feb. 23. It was streamed live to all the BCA’s approximately 60 temples, churches, Sanghas and fellowships — and to the Hawaii and Canada kyodans. The BCA’s Bay District, which hosted the virtual NCM, came up with the idea of reaching out to an expanded audience.

Bishop Rev. Marvin Harada shared his insights on

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Why Support BCA’s Dharma Forward?

Every Donation Plays Vital Role in Shaping Future of Shin Buddhism

By Michiko Inanaga

BCA Endowment Foundation
Director of Development

Our temples have long been a cornerstone of compassion, culture and community — a place where we come together in the Dharma, celebrate traditions and support one another through life’s journey.

Now, we have the opportunity to ensure that this space — and the

values it upholds — continue to thrive for generations to come.

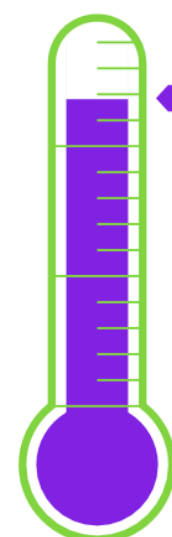
We are hopeful to complete an important fundraising campaign, Dharma Forward, this year, not out of urgency, but out of vision.

This is about strengthening our community, preserving our traditions, centering life’s chaotic demands and expanding opportunities for learning and connection.

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Dharma Forward

\$15,000,000



Raised
\$12,596,641

BISHOP’S MESSAGE

Lessons From a Comedian – and Buddhism

By Rev. Marvin Harada
Bishop of the BCA

I recently had the privilege of meeting a Japanese woman who is a stand-up comedian. When I was introduced to her, I thought, “Huh? A woman from Japan who is a stand-up comedian? How fascinating.”

Her name is Michelle MaliZaki and you can find some of her stand-up comedy on the internet. I hope she becomes a big success.

One of her jokes is about being married to a rocket scientist: “I’m married to a white rocket scientist,” she says. “He doesn’t talk! For communication, we exchange pie charts.”

I asked her how she comes up with new material for her comedy and she said that she basically takes it from everyday life. I shared with her how I also try to draw my Dharma messages from everyday life as well.

When I think of some of my favorite comedians, they all relate comedy to everyday life. Jerry Seinfeld is probably the most famous for that. “Seinfeld,” his hit show that we used to watch was, as he touted, about “nothing,” meaning the show centered around some kind of everyday life occurrence for Jerry and his friends, Elaine, George and Kramer.



BCA Bishop Rev. Marvin Harada recently met stand-up comedian Michelle MaliZaki at a golf tournament. (Courtesy of Rev. Marvin Harada)

Remember the show about them waiting for a table at a Chinese restaurant? We could all relate to that show because we have all experienced something like that.

Having a sense of humor is so important in life. Laughing is very healthy. It is important in Buddhism as well. We have to be able to laugh at ourselves, at our own foolishness, at our own ego self, as we are shown it, as a reflection of the teachings.

We look around the house for our glasses and find that they are on top of our heads the whole time. We can’t find our favorite baseball cap and begin to blame our family members for moving it and

come to realize we left it in the car. On and on and on, we find things to laugh about ourselves in our daily life. When we see other people do stupid or foolish things, it makes us laugh, but really, the only reason we can see that in others is because it exists in ourselves.

Rev. Haya Akegarasu, in his writings, once mentioned that he was with a group of ministers and they were all complaining that their orei or honorariums were too small. He told them that the reason why they saw their orei as small is because they were tight with money themselves. If we ourselves weren’t tight, we wouldn’t be able to see it

in others.

We can see others as greedy because greed exists in us. We see anger in others because we have anger within us, too. Of course, we see others lose control of their anger in ways that we would never do, but even at that, sometimes we can’t see ourselves when we get that angry.

I remember once when my children were small, I was scolding them about something. The bathroom mirror was just at the right angle and I caught an image of myself being angry. It was an ugly sight. Is that what I look like when I get mad? Oh, my gosh.

Seeing ourselves can be funny or it can be painful as well. Shinran Shonin saw deeply into himself and saw the depth of his ego, but at the same time, he saw the depth of the Dharma. He found that it was only because of the light of the Dharma that he was able to see the depth of his ego.

I think that seeing the humorous side of our foolishness is the beginning of seeing ourselves at greater depth. Rather than being offended or angered when we are made to see a foolish side of ourselves, we should just laugh instead.

Going to see a stand-up comedian could be not only entertaining, but it could be a chance to laugh at the foolishness of ourselves.

Rev. Takata

Continued from Page 1

for those who lost their homes and all their belongings.

Since the West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple is located near the Palisades fire, we moved the statue of the Buddha, scrolls of masters, deceased record books, etc. to a secure location on the night of Jan. 7 as a precaution.

This was likely the first time in the history of our temple that these sacred objects had been taken outside the temple. During the evacuation of our sacred objects from the temple altar, Ho-onko service was held with a temporary altar, where the Name of Amida Buddha was enshrined in place of the statue of the Buddha. All the sacred objects and important records were safely returned to the temple on Jan. 29.

During my three weeks of observing the wildfires with uncertainty and anxiety, Shinran Shonin’s saying came to my mind:

“With a foolish being full of blind passions, in this fleeting world — this burning house — all matters without exception are empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. The Nembutsu alone is true and

real.”

— Shinran Shonin, CWS, Page 679

Similar tragedies and events constantly occur all over the world. As Sakyamuni Buddha teaches us all things in this world are constantly changing. Everything is empty and temporary. There is no permanent self.

“With a foolish being full of blind passions, in this fleeting world — this burning house — all matters without exception are empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. The Nembutsu alone is true and real.”

— Shinran Shonin, CWS, Page 679

However, failing to recognize this and clinging to the notion of a permanent self can lead to great pain and suffering. While the teaching of impermanence is easy to understand, fully embracing this truth can be quite challenging, especially when we confront it. Hearing the working of Amida Buddha’s Wisdom and Compassion can help us move forward in accepting and realizing this difficult truth and reality.

Shinran Shonin respectfully received the truth from

living in a fleeting world without a dependable truth.


During times of a wildfire, we encounter a great deal of uncertain truths such as false emergency alerts, scams, incorrect information, etc. The truth defined by our self-centered perspectives constantly changes depending on our convenience and is therefore not dependable. Yet, we often accept the false truth as true based on our convenience. Shinran Shonin teaches us that we have no choice but to call this defiled world empty

and false totally without truth and sincerity if we act, speak and think solely based on our convenience arising from our defiled passions.

Amida Buddha constantly calls out to those consumed by greed, anger and ignorance, who are unaware of burning their selfishness, urging them to be aware of the dangers of the burning house.

Shinran Shonin reminded us that our defiled passions caused by our self-centered minds are so deeply rooted in us that extinguishing the flames full of defiled passions is beyond our ability. He urged us to entrust ourselves to the dependable truth, Nammoamidabutsu, which is only true and real in this defiled world, rather than relying on the uncertain truths created by foolish beings consumed by selfish desires.

As I reflect on the tragedy of the Southern California wildfires, I realize how easily I am swayed by negative thoughts and emotions due to my self-centered mind by hearing the Buddha’s Primal Vow. Furthermore, I have come to realize that my compassion and empathy for the victims are truly limited and my small compassion cannot



Wheel
of Dharma

(USPS 017-700)
Official Publication of the
Buddhist Churches of America

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Wheel of Dharma (USPS 017-700) is published monthly by Buddhist Churches of America, 1710 Octavia St., San Francisco, CA 94109-4341. Periodicals Postage Paid at San Francisco, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WHEEL OF DHARMA, 1710 Octavia St., San Francisco, CA 94109-4341. Subscription free to BCA temple members; \$12.00 annual subscription for nonmembers.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dharma Forward: Now Is the Time to Reach Campaign's Goal



By Steven Terusaki
BCA President

Dharma Forward has been a significant fundraising effort by the BCA and IBS over the past five years. It has resulted in \$12.6 million in donations since its inception. In this President's message, I would like to trace the history of this important campaign and acknowledge all who have contributed their ideas, advocacy and support that have allowed the campaign to achieve its success.

I also hope that it will encourage readers to show their deep appreciation for all their efforts and provide additional support to the campaign as we near its completion at the end of this year.

The Dharma Forward campaign evolved from more than a decade of discussions and actions by BCA and IBS leadership.

In the early 2010s, an effort to coordinate fundraising began. At that time, multiple letters requesting donations were sent to BCA members, which led to comments like, "What letter should I respond to?" and "All the BCA wants is more money."

BCA Vice President **Charlene Grinolds** from the White River Buddhist Temple led the effort to coordinate and consolidate the donation effort.

In 2015, **Bishop Rev. Kodo Umez** approached the BCA Endowment Foundation (BCAEF) and requested that in addition to being

responsible for investments, BCAEF return to its historical roots to be responsible for development for Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in America. That role was established in 1929 with the launch of the Zaidan fund. Having made that commitment, BCAEF created the Joint Committee on Development (JCoD) to bring together the BCA, IBS and BCAEF under one umbrella to coordinate fundraising efforts. JCoD was led by **Koichi Sayano** (BCAEF) and **me** (BCA).

The coordinated fundraising effort with the organizational backing of JCoD and

BCA President **Ken Tanimoto** culminated in the launch of the Dana Program in 2016. The Dana Program provides necessary financial support for the BCA's annual operating needs, including the Center for Buddhist Education (CBE) and BCA's allocation to the Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS), line items in BCA's annual budget.

With the successful launch of the Dana Program addressing operational needs of the BCA, JCoD turned its attention to the need for a new capital campaign to provide the financial resources for the

future. The last capital campaign was the 21st Century Campaign. It ran in the early 2000s and raised over \$20 million ending in 2011. The donations were mostly dedicated to establishing the Jodo Shinshu Center (JSC), which opened in 2006. However, it had been a generation since the BCA had put together a campaign to raise monies for future investment in new initiatives and programs for Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in America.

Dharma Forward's Start

Continued on Page 4



Approximately 40 participants and volunteers gathered at the Buddhist Church of Fowler on March 9 for a yoga retreat. The event was sponsored by the BCA's Center for Buddhist Education (CBE) and Dharma Forward. (Courtesy of Bob Matsueda and Rev. Bob Oshita)



Fowler Yoga Retreat Attracts 40 Participants, Volunteers

By Merv Maruyama
Buddhist Church of Sacramento

On a beautiful, spring-like day, approximately 40 participants and volunteers gathered at the Buddhist Church of Fowler on March 8 for a yoga retreat.

This event was sponsored by the BCA's Center of Buddhist Education (CBE) and the Dharma Forward campaign.

As was befitting the Ohigan season when we appreciate the balance of the length of the days and nights, participants were given the opportunity to balance both the body and mind.

Bob Matsueda, yoga and wellness Instructor who is certified as a yoga therapist by the Government of India, Ministry of Ayurvedic Medi-

cine, led participants through a series of traditional movements emphasizing breathing. These concepts and exercises were presented in Matsueda's gentle, non-competitive manner along with his usual good humor. We learned that yoga is much more than just poses (asanas). Yoga can be experienced by everyone, regardless of age or physical condition. Expansive breathing and movement, no matter how gentle or subtle, leads to calmness and a positive outlook to life, enabling us to share and give of ourselves to others. In this way, acts of kindness and service to others is also yoga.

Following the morning session, we were all treated to a delicious vegetarian lunch prepared by chef Alan Hirahara, along with some local

kitchen helpers. Even the most skeptical carnivores among us had to admit that the food was absolutely delicious and in harmony with the events of the morning.

Following lunch, we experienced the restorative qualities of Nidra yoga. Our yoga teacher guided us through deep relaxation, which is one form of meditation.

Our bodies nourished and relaxed, we were ready to open our minds to learning about the relationship of Buddhism to yoga led by BCA Minister Emeritus Rev. Bob Oshita.

Buddhism, originating in India, naturally is influenced by the concepts of yoga. Many of us learned for the first time that some of the ancient concepts of yoga are reflected in Buddhist art, temples and ritual elements, even our incense

burners and candlesticks. It was a fascinating discussion of the influence of yoga on Buddhism and its various manifestations in different sects of Buddhism, including our own Jodo Shinshu tradition.

Dinner followed and Hirahara and his volunteers topped his lunch with an even more expansive menu that pleased everyone's palate. It was a clear demonstration that Hirahara's heart and selfless giving could be tasted in this delicious meal.

After the events of the day, each participant shared their reflections on this experience. The yoga exercises, the relationship between Buddhism and yoga, and the communal experience of being with Dharma friends both old and new, gave us all an appreciation for how deeply we are

dependent and connected to each other.

Of course, after our reflections on the day came the time to just socialize and visit. Learning new ways of connecting with our bodies, nourished by delicious healthy food (well, maybe not the desserts), connecting with others and deepening our understanding of Buddha, made for a memorable day in Fowler.

Our deepest thanks go to Rev. Patti Oshita in organizing the logistics of this event, the volunteers from the Fowler Buddhist Church who were so hospitable, our yoga teacher, Bob Matsueda, chef Alan Hirahara, and Rev. Bob Oshita, our Dharma teacher. Thanks also to the CBE and Dharma Forward for making this event possible.

President’s Message

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A special session of JCoD met March 29, 2018, marking the genesis of the Dharma Forward campaign. At the meeting were key leaders of the BCA and BCAEF: **Rev. Marvin Harada, Rev. Jerry Hirano, Rev. Patti Usuki, Bishop Rev. Kodo Umezu, Rick Stambul, Terri Omori, Steve Terusaki, Hide Mizuno, Steve Okamoto, Koichi Sayano and Tom Nishikawa.**

Others not in attendance but instrumental in the creation of the Dharma Forward campaign were the late **Rev. Dr. Seigen Yamaoka, Rev. Dr. David Matsumoto,** the late **Jeff Folick** and **John Mullins.**

The JCoD special session tackled the following issues, including:

- Planning for a new five-year fundraising campaign;
- Investing in outreach efforts;
- Funding IBS professional chair endowments;
- Enhancing ministerial benefits;
- Developing Buddhist education; and
- Funding the needs of BCA facilities, including the JSC and upgrades to the BCA headquarters in San Francisco.

At the meeting, **Rev. Patti Usuki** voiced a passionate appeal that the purpose of the campaign should be to ensure that the Dharma is available for future generations. It set the focus of the campaign to center on the dharma as its purpose.

In November 2018, BCAEF President **Charles Ozaki** introduced the motion to the BCAEF board that resulted in supporting the new campaign.

In March 2019 at the BCA’s National Council Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, BCA President **Rick Stambul** oversaw the approval of the campaign along with a resolution for use of the first \$1 million in campaign donations.

In preparation for the public launch of the campaign, a number of decisions and commitments needed to be made.

The first was to settle on a name for the campaign. BCA Treasurer **Jeffery Matsuoka**, of the Buddhist Church of San Francisco, filtered through all the various permutations of campaign names and offered a simple, **DHARMA FORWARD.** It resonated and it stuck.

The campaign committee struggled with many other issues. In response, the late **Jeff Folick**, of the Orange County Buddhist Church and BCAEF Vice President, encouraged the committee that it did not have to have everything complete to launch. He stated, “The time is now. We can’t wait any further.” It was with Jeff’s fervent statement that the committee moved forward to a public launch at the National Council Meeting in Renton, Washington, in February 2020.

In preparation for the public launch, a campaign film was created to introduce the Dharma Forward Campaign to the BCA Sangha. A draft storyboard was created by **John Inge**, of the Tacoma Buddhist Temple, and fleshed out by **John Mullins**, of the San Fernando Valley Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, and IBS student who worked closely with **Joshua Izenberg** of Only Human — an award-winning filmmaker from the Bay Area.

In developing the storyline, **Bishop Rev. Marvin Harada** introduced the narrative of the monarch butterfly. It was the story of the migration of the monarch butterfly over multiple generations and its ability to return home.

The analogy with the BCA could be clearly seen. Generations of Shin Buddhist followers have stepped forward and through their perseverance and dedicated efforts have built the Buddhist Churches of America as our home.

It is now the responsibility of this generation to cement the legacy of the efforts of these past generations to ensure that there will always be a home where the Dharma can move forward into the future.

This film is available for viewing on the BCA YouTube channel and can be accessed here: bit.ly/3RjXSDh

I encourage you to revisit the founding principles of the Dharma Forward campaign

that are highlighted in the film.

Since 2020

Since the campaign’s inception, \$12.6 million of the \$15 million goal has been received.

Initial efforts to promote the campaign were hampered by the pandemic. As temples were forced to close, the campaign took a backseat to the concerns around public safety of social gatherings.

Despite the overwhelming pressure it placed on temples and churches, leadership within the BCA, BCAEF and IBS led the way with contributions to the campaign. As life began to return to normal the Dharma Forward campaign received support and contributions grew over time.

Dharma Forward has made a meaningful impact in a variety of areas, including:

- Supporting ministerial aspirants on their journey to Tokudo ordination and Kyoshi certification;
- Providing financial assistance for the ministerial assistant training programs;
- Helping temples refresh their websites;
- Increasing the financial strength of the IBS endowed professorial chairs;
- Hiring a Field Education Director supporting ministerial and chaplaincy students at IBS;
- Supporting the production of audio books;
- Supporting new gatha music and Obon Odori; and
- Restoring the Kosho Ohtani Building Fund as a low-interest rate loan resource for local temples and churches faced with renovations and maintenance issues.

Fulfilling these various needs are examples of the value that Dharma Forward has brought to both BCA and IBS. Each represents another step in the journey to ensure the future of Shin Buddhism in America.

Dharma Forward has also been the catalyst to invest in a dedicated team that oversees the fundraising efforts. In 2020, **Michiko Inanaga**

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BCA Center for Buddhist Education presents

YOGA & THE THREE TREASURES

Friday, May 23 - Sunday, May 25, 2025

Jodo Shinshu Center, Berkeley



Bob Matsuoka

Yoga Teacher & Yoga Therapist (Govt. of India)



Bishop Marvin Harada

Buddhist Churches of America Dharma Message



Rev. Jerry Hirano

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DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that BCA Music participants from 30 BCA temples and groups were represented in the gatha video premiere of “Next Chapter” during the BCA National Council Meeting closing program on March 2?

It can be viewed with the rest of the BCA Eitaikyo service and program on the BCA YouTube channel.

Use the time stamps to catch what you may have missed: bit.ly/43KL8NJ



Southern District ministers and other BCA ministers gathered for a group photo at the annual Winter Pacific Seminar at the Orange County Buddhist Church (OCBC) on Jan. 25. Shown, from left, are: Rev. Ellen Crane (OCBC), Rev. Yukari Torii (San Fernando Valley Hongwanji Buddhist Temple), Rev. Hibiki Murakami (Los Angeles Homba Hongwanji Buddhist Temple), Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Wondra (OCBC), Rev. Kiyonobu Kuwahara (Berkeley Buddhist Temple and Buddhist Temple of Marin), Rev. Jerry Hirano (Salt Lake Buddhist Temple, Honeyville Buddhist Temple and Buddhist Church of Ogden), Bishop Rev. Marvin Harada, Rev. Dr. Takashi Miyaji (Southern Alameda County Buddhist Church and IBS Dean), Rev. Jon Turner (OCBC), Rev. Koho Takata (West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple) and Rev. Ryuta Furumoto (Senshin Buddhist Temple). (Courtesy of R. Hiroshima)

Winter Pacific Seminar Features ‘Issues in Jodo Shinshu Heterodoxy’

By Rick Oishi
Orange County Buddhist Church

More than 140 in-person participants and 23 others who joined online were treated to hear four outstanding BCA ministers discuss “Issues in Jodo Shinshu Heterodoxy” at this year’s Winter Pacific Seminar. The event was presented by the Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS) and the BCA’s Buddhist Education Committee (BEC) at the Orange County Buddhist Church (OCBC) on Jan. 25.

Bishop Rev. Marvin Harada, Rev. Kiyonobu Kuwahara, Rev. Dr. Takashi Miyaji and Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Wondra made presentations in English and Japanese, providing personal insight regarding the seminar’s topic. The half-day seminar provided a glimpse into this complex issue and generated wishes for more time, more information and more discussion. Heterodoxy refers to a deviation from accepted or orthodox opinion or doctrine. Rev. Dr. Miyaji said in Nishi Hongwanji’s history, there were three major debates into doctrinal heterodoxy. These debates were so sensitive and combustible that a schism developed that threatened to ruin the Hongwanji-ha.

Each presenter offered a perspective of orthodoxy and the many challenges from many leaders with differing interpretations and understanding that became major issues of heterodoxy. The Nishi Hongwanji confronted these heterodoxy as it organized and prepared ministers to follow one orthodoxy based on basic Buddha-Dharma teachings. Rev. Harada expressed an essential requirement in our current approach to doctrine is to allow a broader interpretation of orthodoxy in Shin Buddhism that allows “magical moments” for individuals. These “magical moments” will allow Shin Buddhism to resonate individually. This is important if we expect the Dharma to spread, he said. Rev. Harada said that the acclaimed cellist Yo-Yo Ma considers that his performances



Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Wondra, left, and Rev. Dr. Takashi Miyaji gave presentations in English and in Japanese on “Issues in Jodo Shinshu Heterodoxy.” (Photos courtesy of Rick Oishi)

are not perfect, but are aimed to evoke emotion and to create a “magical moment.” This allows the music to live in somebody else, he said. Rev. Harada said the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Dharma needs to inspire a “magical moment” so that the Dharma will continue to spread. He believes that we treat Jodo Shinshu teachings as pure and perfect and that our responsibility is to preserve and protect those perfect teachings. This is important, he said, but he added that at the same time, we must be gracious to broaden the expression. Rev. Kuwahara provided two key points: 1) role of doctrine; and 2) relationship between Shinjin and Nembutsu. He said that doctrine is necessary to understand as our guide and must be interpreted properly. He described borders between countries, with each country having different laws of driving, voting, alcohol drinking, etc. “Is my understanding correct?” Rev. Kuwahara said. “Is my interpretation right?” He said that it is important to ask ourselves this when we think about Shinjin, the Nembutsu, Amida Buddha and the Pure Land. The doctrine is a tool to guide us and a mirror to look at ourselves. Different schools of Buddhism offer different doctrines or teachings. There are borders that separate and if we decide if it is outside our border, then it is invalid or illegitimate, which

is called heresy or heterodoxy. But, if it is within our borders, he said it is valid and legitimate and we consider it as orthodoxy. Rev. Kuwahara said we must look to ourselves and question if our understanding and interpretation is correct. Hongwanji-ha has a staff that examines doctrine and determines what interpretations and understanding is proper and valid. Rev. Kuwahara discussed the role of Shinjin with a question. Because of Shinjin, he asks: Do we say the Nembutsu or do we attain Shinjin as we recite the Nembutsu? Rev. Dr. Miyaji spoke about “Ichinen Kakuchi,” or “One Thought Awareness.” This is a long-standing debate at Hongwanji-ha, he said. The heterodoxy is: In order to have Shinjin, one should have a distinct awareness of it in one’s heart and mind. If we cannot recall the exact time when Shinjin occurred, it is not considered genuine and the person is said not to have Shinjin. The issue of Ichinen Kakuchi can be traceable back to a major debate that occurred in the Hongwanji’s past, known as the “Sango Wakuran Incident.” The basic premise was how does Shinjin manifest in the practitioner and should the person show they have Shinjin if they indeed have it, he said. Rev. Dr. Miyaji said there were two opposing positions. The first group answered “yes” to the above questions. They were known as the Old Inter-



pretation School, supported namely by the Noke, or Chief Excelsior in Shinshu. The other group who answered “no” was the Reformed Interpretation School. They believed that one does not necessarily need to show that they have Shinjin because this might lead to followers believing that devotional actions would be a way to acquire Shinjin, which would be a form of self-practice, or jiriki. This debate became so argumentative and unresolvable that the Hongwanji had to appeal to the Bakufu Shogunate to step in and settle the issue, according to Rev. Dr. Miyaji. What was decided, he said, was that the Reformed Interpretation School was closer to founder Shinran Shonin’s thoughts. As a result, the Noke was abolished, and a new system of a council of scholars, called Kangakuryo, as opposed to one supreme doctrinal authority, was put in place. The new orthodox position was that it was not necessary to make a show of one’s Shinjin through signs of devotion in one’s actions (body, speech and mind). According to Rev. Dr. Miyaji, similar to this issue is Ichinen Kakuchi, where one must know (namely through the action of the mind) when exactly one has acquired Shinjin. The orthodox position is that when we say that one must know when Shinjin occurred in the past, the individual is relying too heavily on one’s memory, something that we all know to

be quite fallible and subject to misapprehensions and mistakes. Instead of focusing on when exactly we acquired it in the past, he said, we should focus on questioning what a true and authentic Shinjin is, and whether one has come to truly take refuge in Amida Buddha’s Great Working here and now. Rev. Dr. Miyaji concluded by saying: “Can we ever talk about Shinjin in its entirety? No. Should we then stop talking about Shinjin because we can’t talk about it in its entirety? Also no. We have to come to accept that there is always going to be a major part of this dynamic phenomenon that we won’t be able to discuss entirely or fully comprehend. “However, we should not misconstrue that to mean that we are somehow barred and excluded from being immersed in Amida’s Great Compassion,” he continued with a smile. “And that’s the beauty of being a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist: We are embraced even though we don’t fully understand that. That’s what it is to be a bombu (ordinary person). Be the bombu, my friend.” -= Rev. Dr. Wondra offered “Issues of Wrong Views in Jodo Shinshu Buddhism.” Rev. Dr. Wondra discussed why rules are necessary for training and teaching and understanding of the Dharma. Rev. Dr. Wondra used Los Angeles Dodgers superstar

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ECOSANGHA PERSPECTIVES

Issa Kobayashi’s Haiku Poems and the Spirit of Mottainai



By Rev. Donald Castro
BCA Minister Emeritus

Issa Kobayashi (1763-1828) is generally regarded as one of the three greatest haiku poets of old Japan and the only one of the three who is distinctly Jodo Shinshu.

In fact, Kobayashi was ordained as a Jodo Shinshu priest although he did not serve in a temple. For him, haiku poetry was his temple, pilgrimages were his spiritual practice and Jodo Shinshu flavored his inspiration.

My particular interest in this article is how Kobayashi’s haiku conveys a Jodo Shinshu spirit of mottainai although, as far as I know, the expression does not appear in his poems. However, Nembutsu, Amida Buddha and other Shinshu words appear often, as in:

“Growing old
Even while moon viewing
Taking refuge (namo) in Amida.
toshiyori ya tsuki o miru
ni mo namo amida”

Of the three great haiku po-

ets, Kobayashi is definitely the most loved for his many warm qualities, including humor, humility and kindness toward people and animals of all kinds. Kobayashi always saw his own life in that of other creatures and their life in his. That fellow-feeling is expressed in the following haiku that every Japanese child knows even today:

“Don’t kill that fly!
See how in fear it’s ringing
Its hands and feet!
yare utsu nah ae ga te
o suri ashi o suru”

A great feudal lord (daimyo) had come to visit the shack that served as Kobayashi’s home and a fly landed near the daimyo. He was about to kill it with a blow of his hand when Kobayashi stopped him.

In Kobayashi’s day, people and homes were infested with flies, fleas, lice, mosquitos, etc. to an extent people today in the “developed” world would find intolerable. Think of the child sent home from school for lice and the furor it creates! Kobayashi had his limits. While on the one hand, he devoted many poems of kindness and sympathy to fleas, etc., he could only take so much, as we see in the following poems:

“The mouth
That cracked the flea
Uttered ‘Namo Amida Butsu.’
nomi kanda kuchi de namo
amida butsu kana”



Over the years, how often I have washed invading ants down the drain while saying the Nembutsu. Of course, I’ve probably said a few less kind words before that! The following haiku follows in the same vein:

“Troublesome flea
By my hand
Become a Buddha!
abare nomi waga te
kakatte joubutsu seyo”

“Become a Buddha” in popular Japanese culture means to die. While Kobayashi regrets killing the flea, he’s reached the limit of his not-so-boundless compassion. Still, he wishes the best for the flea in its next life. I include one more Jodo Shinshu inspired haiku before looking more deeply into them:

“In winter seclusion

While cooking a chicken
Saying the Nembutsu
fuyugomori tori ryori ni
mo nembutsu kana”

Unlike religious traditions that believe animals were put here by a god to serve human needs, for instance, being eaten, Buddhists have no such belief and take full responsibility for living at the expense of other forms of life. With the kind of fellow-feeling for other creatures that Kobayashi had, we bow our heads and say “Itadakimasu” (“I humbly partake of this food.”) before eating.

There is a brand of frozen dinners that proclaims on the package, “Love what you eat” with a picture of a cow or whatever meat is in the ingredients (They have recently removed the picture but not the proclamation.). When I first saw this packaging, I wondered if the company realized the implications of what they were saying, “Love what you eat.” It seems contradictory yet it brings us back to Kobayashi’s chicken and mottainai.

Kobayashi loved creatures of all kinds. With the cooked chicken, he loved what he ate. We could also say, “He ate what he loved.” My challenge as a Buddhist is to turn the food that sustains me into enlightened action, otherwise, my selfishly depriving another creature of life is, I believe, mottainai; I have wasted their life. Since I am a foolish being filled with blind passions, I say

“Itadakimasu.” That vegetarians also live at the expense of other forms of life is the theme of my next Wheel of Dharma article.

Returning to Kobayashi’s love and fellow-feeling for other creatures, I conclude my article with the following haiku:

“I’m about to turn over in bed
Look out Katydid!
negaeri o suru zo soko
noke kirigirisu”

Note: There are many books on Issa Kobayashi, both for adults and children. I particularly want to praise the translations and commentary of Professor David G. Lanoue, who has written several wonderful studies emphasizing Kobayashi’s Jodo Shinshu Buddhist orientation.

Two of his books are “Pure Land Haiku: the Art of Priest Issa” (Buddhist Books International, Revised Second Print Edition, 2016 Copyright David G. Lanoue) and “Issa and the Meaning of Animals: A Buddhist Poet’s Perspective,” copyright 2014 by David G. Lanoue. Professor Lanoue maintains an extensive website: HaikuGuy.com and has served as President of the Haiku Society of America. The translations of Kobayashi’s haiku in this article are my own based on my limited knowledge of Japanese and comparing various translations of the same haiku poem.


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A Promise Shared

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There can be a big “gap” between the “truth” level of Buddhism, and those who are on the “practical” level of Buddhism.



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Bishop Rev. Marvin Harada discusses the conflict between the practical level versus the truth level of Buddhism and Rev. Jon Turner describes EverydayBuddhist.org and its temple affiliate program. (Courtesy of BCA YouTube)

Town Hall

Continued from Page 1

the topic of practical Buddhism versus truth level Buddhism, and Rev. Jon Turner, Resident Minister of the Orange County Buddhist Church (OCBC), described the online EverydayBuddhist.org and its outreach efforts, course offerings, growth in developing a global audience, and what participants want and like about it.

“All of our great Buddhist masters and teachers are expressing Buddhism at the truth level,” Rev. Harada said. “But the average person is more interested in Buddhism at a practical level, asking questions like ‘Will Buddhism help me live a happier life?’ ‘Will it help me to ease my stress or anxiety?’ ‘Will it help me to live a more meaningful life?’

“So there can be a big gap between the truth level of Buddhism and those who are on the practical level,” he said.

Practical vs. Truth

One example, he said, is the Sunday service.

“Let’s say, as a minister, we give a sermon and we’re trying to talk about Buddhism from a truth level, but people are listening with an interest at the practical level,” he said. “So there’s this disconnect. Ministers get frustrated — ‘How come people aren’t understanding my message?’ — but the members are thinking, ‘How come sensei is so intellectual and how come you can’t bring it down to our level?’”

Rev. Harada said contemporary Buddhist teachers are addressing the issue and listed books by the Dalai Lama, Dan Harris and the renowned late Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh.

Rev. Harada singled out the following books:

- “The Art of Happiness” by the Dalai Lama;
- “10% Happier” by Dan Harris; and
- Several books by Thich Nhat Hanh, including “No Mud, No Lotus,” “No Death, No Fear,” “Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm,” and “Living Buddha, Living Christ.”

Rev. Harada said that “Shin Buddhism or Jodo Shinshu

Buddhism is a little behind in presenting the practical level of Shin Buddhism. But first we have to address what Shin Buddhism will not get you. It’s not going to get you a jackpot by saying ‘Namo Amida Butsu.’ But although Shin Buddhism will not get you a million dollars, it could help a person feel like a million dollars.

“Buddhism will not cure cancer, but it can give you the spiritual strength to face or even embrace your cancer by having a positive attitude and facing illness,” he said. “That’s a big part of whether one is actually healed or not. But it’s not going to necessarily cure your cancer if you recite the Nembutsu 1,000 times or something like that. So that is where the practical level of Buddhism and the truth level of Buddhism begin to merge and connect.”

Rev. Harada shared a few remembrances of OCBC Sangha members as exemplifying the truth level of Buddhism.

One was a member who was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer.

“Her demeanor never changed,” he said. “That’s terrible news to receive. You have stage four pancreatic cancer. Now you have to go through chemotherapy and all that, but her demeanor never changed. She maintained this positive attitude, grateful for her life, even though it was tragically cut short.”

Rev. Harada quoted poems he translated by Ayako Suzuki, the wife of a Jodo Shinshu minister, who died of cancer. This poem was written after her diagnosis of cancer.

*“If one awakens to death,
One feels much stronger about life,
Exact opposites melt into one, and
There is an incomprehensible peacefulness.”*

And this poem:

*“I will become Namo Amida Butsu for my children.
I will become Namo Amida Butsu for my friends and temple members.
When you think of me, please say ‘Namo Amida Butsu,’ and
I will call the Nembutsu in return.”*

“She’s saying, ‘When I die, I will become Namo Amida

Butsu,” Rev. Harada said. “She doesn’t say, ‘When I die, I will go to the Pure Land.’ She says, ‘I will become Namo Amida Butsu.’ And that truth that she has received and encountered in her life, that truth is here now and it will remain with her family. ‘When you think of me, please say ‘Namo Amida Butsu,’ and I will call the Nembutsu in return.”

Rev. Harada shared another heartfelt poem by another late OCBC Sangha member, Scott Morris.

Morris was not raised as a Buddhist but his wife was a Buddhist, so the family began attending OCBC. Sadly, he was diagnosed with ALS, or Lou Gehrig’s disease, for which there is no cure.

“If you get cancer, there’s some hope for a cure through surgery, radiation and chemotherapy,” Rev. Harada said. “But if you get ALS, the best you can hope for is a slow developing ALS and it’s an illness that begins in your feet and works its way up your body.”

OCBC formed a living through illness support group and Morris attended regularly. At one session, he was particularly sad.

“I’m going to be missing so many things in life,” Rev. Harada recalled Morris saying. “I probably won’t be around for my son’s high school graduation. I’ll never be able to walk my daughter down the aisle on her wedding day.”

Rev. Harada encouraged him to write letters to his children that they would read at those milestones in their lives.

Instead, Morris wrote a poem which he shared at the next month’s support group:

*“I have ALS and I am grateful.
I am grateful to retire early to be with my family.
I am grateful I have family and friends that are so supportive and hopeful.
I am grateful I can still walk and get around.
When that is gone, I am grateful I can still use my hands to feed myself.
When that is gone, I am grateful I can still breathe and laugh and feel.
When that is gone, I am grateful I had a wonderful life.
“When that is gone,
Namumidabutsu.”*

“I put this poem right up

there with any of the masters — it’s so profound,” Rev. Harada said. “Scott came to encounter the Nembutsu, not just as a word, but as a profound truth. He encountered it at the truth level. That’s why, even when his physical life is gone, what’s still there is the truth of Namo Amida Butsu.”

He added: “Initially, we might be interested in Buddhism at the practical level, but if we continue on the path, we will encounter it at the truth level.”

Rev. Harada quoted from one of Shinran Shonin’s famous passages that he said expresses the truth level:

“With a foolish being full of blind passions, in this fleeting world — this burning house — all matters without exception are empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. The Nembutsu alone is true and real.”

— Shinran Shonin, CWS, Page 679

“He’s saying, ‘Everything in our life, our work, our assets, our relationships, everything is false in comparison to the truth of the Nembustu,” Rev. Harada said. “The Nembutsu alone is true and real.”

In conclusion, Rev. Harada said the challenge for future propagation efforts is to bring out the practical side of Shin Buddhism without it becoming something superficial.

“We don’t want it to be oversimplified,” he said. “Shin Buddhism or Jodo Shinshu Buddhism has this tremendous depth. We have to always have the truth level, but at the same time, we have to bring out the practical level.

“If we cannot communicate this practical level of Shin Buddhism, how can we interest those who are seeking the Dharma and connect with them? Because they’re obviously looking to Buddhism at this practical level. So, that is our challenge as we strive to share our Shin Buddhist teachings with the world to bring out the practical level that leads to the truth level.”

EverydayBuddhist.org


Rev. Turner shared the lessons learned from EverydayBuddhist.org and developing an online platform, which began in September 2017 at the request of Rev. Harada, who wanted a bigger online presence with

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To view “A Promise Shared,” go to: bit.ly/4233F53

For information about EverydayBuddhist.org: <https://www.everydaybuddhist.org/>

Buddhist education. He described the surprising feedback from students who wanted shorter lectures, blogs, live events, videos, as well as quizzes — but not being graded — and bibliographies listing the source materials.

“They weren’t looking for a formal education program,” Rev. Turner said. “They wanted experiences. They wanted contact with other people. They wanted a community. They wanted to be part of a path.”

EverydayBuddhist.org draws from a lot of people who don’t live near a BCA temple or church.

“They live in Oklahoma or they live in Thailand or they live in Spain,” he said.

He said the aim of the brand is to be authentic yet contemporary, and a subscription model was established.

Of the participants, Rev. Turner said 40% found it through social media and another 30% discovered it through their current BCA temple or church, as well as through the BCA website.

“We’re just slowly growing, slowly increasing our numbers and propagating the Jodo Shinshu teachings to people in their own homes,” he said.

Rev. Turner said EverydayBuddhist.org has established a temple affiliate program, a partnership between EverydayBuddhist.org and the BCA temples.

The temples are given a link to the EverydayBuddhist.org website and any student that clicks on that link from the temple website and subscribes will return 10% of the revenue to the temple. To date, there are 12 BCA temples and churches that are part of the affiliate program, and that number is expected to increase.

“I think people have to understand that it’s a lifelong process and that they should be patient,” Rev. Turner said. “Sometimes, people kind of want immediate results from



The crowd at the West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple “Lantern Song” workshop poses with their favorite move from the Bon Odori. The five Bonbu Stories members are shown kneeling at front. The workshop was held on Feb. 24, 2024. (Courtesy of Bryce Ikemura)

Bonbu Stories

Continued from Page 1

addressing it on my own, and other times, it was a meal I eagerly shared with friends over art and music for hours on end.

Of course, I am no stranger to the little griefs of daily life — mourning a new haircut or savoring my last cup of good matcha until I can buy more — but the gargantuan grief of death and loss has been relatively new to me.

In late September 2023, almost a year into the process of creating “Lantern Song,” a dear friend of mine died very suddenly in a biking accident. It was an emotional devastation that I suppose I’ve been lucky to have just felt for the first time at the age of 29, but it has only kept building on itself with the passing of my maternal great-grandmother in January 2024 and then the passing of my paternal grandmother in June 2024.

Grief has completely restructured my life and continues to do so even now — in 2025.

Through all of this, working on and performing “Lantern Song” with my fellow Bonbu Stories members (or bonbus) and being in community with everyone who has collaborated with us and danced to and listened to our song has been the communal dinner party to help me ease my sorrows and swallow and digest my grief.

Bonbu Stories

Bonbu Stories is: Mi-haru Okamura, a Yonsei singer-songwriter from the Buddhist Church of Oakland; Sydney Shiroyama, a Yonsei Minister’s Assistant and taiko player from Palo Alto Buddhist Temple; Miko Shudo, a Yonsei singer-songwriter and music instructor from the Ox-nard Buddhist Temple; Kendall Tani (myself), a Yonsei



The 1,000 oil lamp sentō shōgon is displayed at Senshin Buddhist Temple’s Obon on July 6, 2024. (Courtesy of Miko Shudo)

visual artist, poet, and taiko player from Mammoth Lakes; and Vicky Zhang, a first-generation Chinese American/Australian taiko player and composer from the Bay Area.

During our first project, “Ways of Being,” we had only just met each other and had no idea what our creative process was going to look like. I was anxious and I didn’t know what I could contribute and how I was going to do so, but we started with one idea that became the backbone of the piece and the rest — instrumentation, vocals, taiko, choreography — fell into place so neatly, so magically, with such care and intention. I have never found it so easy to be so vulnerable and trusting in creating art with another group of people.

The size of the ask for “Lantern Song” was certainly intimidating to us despite it also being an honor to add our

own voices to Obon.

“Lantern Song” was commissioned by the BCA Music Bon Odori Taiko Subcommittee in honor of the BCA’s 125th anniversary in 2024. The subcommittee wanted to promote young Buddhist voices to commemorate the anniversary, and it was funded by the BCA Music Committee budget request to BCA.

The YouTube video of “Lantern Song” now has 8,000 views and was funded through the BCA Music Committee Endowment Foundation account through a generous donation from the estate of Mrs. Yumiko Hojo.

On a personal level, I was again apprehensive about what I could contribute, lacking Buddhist knowledge and, at the time, lived experience with death and grief. Like our other projects, however, I didn’t need to worry about the content and relied instead on our

process, drawing from each of our diverse strengths, relationships and artistry to synthesize our lived experiences to form a cohesive whole.

Okamura and Shudo wrote the lyrics, melody and instrumentation as a conversation between ourselves and our ancestors. Zhang later wrote the taiko accompaniment, and all of us contributed to the Odori choreography, coordinating with our lyrics and also taking inspiration from some of our favorite existing moves.

Since our founding in 2019, making art as a part of Bonbu Stories has been one long continuous lesson on the value and importance of connection and community, of individual yielding to and contributing to the collective. We’ve always looked to our mentors for assistance and guidance and reached out to

tus Rev. Mas Kodani, Nobuko Miyamoto, and PJ and Roy Hirabayashi. Rev. Kodani shared a story about hanging Obon lanterns a few years ago.

He had been attending Obon for decades, but only realized that year that he knew every name on all the lanterns and had known every person who had passed. He saw this as a reminder that Obon is not meant to only be a family festival, but that “(Obon is) about death and remembering your dead relatives ... if you avoid death, you are avoiding life. You can’t have one without the other.”

Inspired by this, one of our singer-songwriters, Miko Shudo, said in an interview with Discover Nikkei that “seeing the lanterns reminds us that our ancestors aren’t really gone — they’re in our hearts and minds as we live and carry

Since our founding in 2019, making art as a part of Bonbu Stories has been one long continuous lesson on the value and importance of connection and community, of individual yielding to and contributing to the collective. We’ve always looked to our mentors for assistance and guidance and reached out to friends to collaborate through song or visuals, but “Lantern Song” is arguably the best example of this as we absolutely could not have done it alone.

friends to collaborate through song or visuals, but “Lantern Song” is arguably the best example of this as we absolutely could not have done it alone.

Its large scope afforded us the opportunity to work with our artistic mentors, studio professionals, and to collaborate with additional musical and visual artists to create a true showing of community.

The premise for our piece was inspired by an early conversation with our friends and mentors BCA Minister Emeri-

on with life.” This conversation helped us establish the foundation for our song.

Through Okamura’s and Shudo’s contacts, we were able to work with a professional studio team that brought our song to life. Recording in Grandma’s Dojo Studio was a breeze to me as someone who has never been recorded professionally before, and while I know nothing about sound engineering, the arranging,



Bonbu Stories

Continued from Page 8

mixing and mastering were all absolutely perfect. We were also able to rope in many different artists to collaborate with us throughout our process.

Musician friends contributed background vocals and koto instrumentation to our track and we had guest performers join us during select Obons to play various instruments or sing live as the sanghas danced.

Visual artist friends created our music video and taught us to hand-carve stamps which we used in our interactive workshops to create memorial lanterns, and guided us in screen printing our own happi coats for our Obon uniform. Every single person who contributed to the project provided a vital voice that made it that much more special.

‘Okagesama De’

In the early days after loss, I often sat with my meal of grief, attempting to eat it, but really just playing with my food as I mulled over one phrase that consistently resonated with me: “okagesama de,” or “thanks to you/because of you, I am.”

I had originally heard the phrase used in reference to the lineages of immigrants who made our lives possible. But on a more personal level, I found the sentiment fitting for my loved ones who more recently passed.

I wished I could tell them how much they meant to me and how thankful I was for making me who I am today, through blood or influence or both. But the more I thought about it, the more my tears would flow and the more my throat would dry up and tighten, holding hostage the gratitude, regrets, apologies, “I love yous,” and “I miss yous” I desperately wanted to say.

There was a visceral heft and ache in my chest with all the love my heart still had for them that needed to be released, but there was seemingly nowhere for it to go. I was scared that if I did release this love the way I felt I needed to, there would only be a void left in its wake. So, I stayed stuck and sat by myself, picking at this meal, repeating the phrase to myself.

Soon after my friend died, we did a webinar with the BCA Music Committee about “Lantern Song,” where fellow bonbu Miko Shudo talked about her inspiration for the lyrics which she elaborated upon in an interview with Discover Nikkei:

“In my own experience with grief after losing my mom and baachan a couple years ago, I found tremendous comfort in the teaching of ‘No Birth, No Death’ by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Just like a cloud never dies, but instead transforms into rain, then



Bonbu Stories hold the purple Makawao tenugui, standing with friends at Makawao Hongwanji Obon in Maui on July 27, 2024. Shown, from left, are: David Shudo, Rev. Kerry Kiyohara, Jean Heselden, Sydney Shiroyama, Kendall Tani, Miharū Okamura, Vicky Zhang, Miko Shudo and Rev. Ronald Kobata. (Courtesy of Jean Heselden)

to a river, ocean and a cloud again, our very heartbeat is an extension of our parents and grandparents and so on. As long as my heart beats, so do theirs, and to me, it makes their presence feel very real and alive.”

Being so stuck, picking at my food, this was the exact thing I needed to hear to help me start eating and digesting my grief. I still cried for a day or five or 20 days repeating “okagesama de” to myself, but tried to keep these teachings with me as the months went on.

“Lantern Song” and Bonbu Stories proved to be the best thing for my mourning; I don’t know how I would have gotten through it otherwise. It is incredibly cliché, but I didn’t realize the profundity of grief until I had to suffer through it.

“Okagesama de” was a pertinent phrase and one of comfort for me, but I didn’t know where or how to direct my feelings and energy that I attached to it. On its own, the phrase is just memory, and I had been stuck stewing in it; but “okagesama de” together with “Lantern Song” is remembrance in practice.

At the height of my emotional pain, I felt a desperate desire and need to express my anguish and love to the whole world; I wanted to be heard, but I really wanted to be understood.

West LA Workshop

Sharing and performing “Lantern Song” gave the phrase direction and purpose, and fulfilled all of these desires and allowed me to be witnessed, held, and loved in the most painful of circumstances.

Throughout the past year, it became a vehicle for a mutual release and catharsis between performer and viewer/participant, and, in doing so, was a vehicle for communal healing.

Our first workshop, held at West Los Angeles Buddhist

Temple on Feb. 24, 2024, was exciting as it was the first time we were performing and teaching our piece in person.

People came from all over Southern California, including Santa Barbara and San Diego, to learn the dance (though they had already learned from our tutorial video!) and spend time in community with us.

We combined our gratitude, reverence, remembrance and grief into something that was uniquely us and nontraditional yet still resonant with people of all ages by capturing the essence of Obon. This past year has shown me that grief has been so much better as a shared meal, a potluck of everyone’s mourning brought to the table to digest over laughter, family, friends, love and art. The lyrics from “Lantern Song” are a dialogue between ourselves and our ancestors, but sharing and performing it felt like a dialogue between us as Bonbu Stories and our community.

We set up some craft stations, one a remembrance tassel station where attendees could write down the names of their loved ones to put on our own communal Bonbu Stories lantern, and the other a tenugui-making station where attendees could stamp and decorate their own tenugui for use in the summer.

One woman included a lantern and a name for every ancestor on her tenugui and told us a little of her family’s history. It was so touching that she had created something so thoughtful from what we thought would be just a fun craft activity.

We were truly overwhelmed with emotion, though, when we began teaching the dance and saw everyone dancing with us in a circle for the first time. To see our work come alive outside of ourselves, with everyone enthusiastically participating, was heartwarming and a bit surreal.

Several people came up to us afterward telling us how much our song meant to them or how they resonated with the English lyrics in their own journeys with loss. I found so much comfort and meaning in this exchange of vulnerability and love; it was not lost on me how special it was that our work had resonated with

people so deeply.

Senshin’s Obon

Our first Obon performance of the season was at Senshin Buddhist Temple on July 6, 2024, an Obon I had not previously attended. I had been warned for years that it wasn’t like other Obons, that it was only dancing and not a festival, and thus special in some way I didn’t quite realize yet.

I still felt very welcomed as the temple was the birthplace of our song in some ways, with us having taken inspiration from Rev. Kodani and also having shared a first draft of the song at the temple in 2023.

The warnings turned out to be true: Senshin’s Obon was unlike any other I had been to and was incredibly special, one I will remember fondly and will actively try to return to in the future. Not having grown up Buddhist, I felt like I got the best sense of the meaning of Obon from participating at

Senshin. Performing taiko with fellow bonbu Vicky Zhang on the yagura and dancing in the innermost circle with the Bon Odori instructors were definitely an exhilarating emotional high, but they were both made better in context of where we were.

From being a part of the entry procession to “Obon no Uta” to performing to offering incense to lighting an oil lamp in the sentō shōgon display, the rituals and practice of remembrance were simultaneously invigorating and grounding, and they all served to remind us of our purpose for being there, together.

I was able to dance in the circle with my cousin for the first time, and I later lit an oil lamp in honor of the grandmother that we share, who passed at 99 years old.

Makawao’s Obon

In a summer of emotional highs and special opportunities, another highlight was getting the chance to lead our dance at Makawao Hongwanji’s Obon on Maui on July 27, 2024.

My great-grandmother passed at the age of 105, and had been a lifelong, dedicated member of the temple in addition to being a beloved and well-known community member.

It was through her and her memorial service I attended in the spring that this special opportunity even came up with the temple not being affiliated with the BCA.

With financial help from TaikoVentures and the generosity of my family, Rev. Kerry Kiyohara, and the Makawao Sangha, we were all able to stay for a long weekend in a new but familiar and welcoming community.

Being so far from California, I didn’t see or talk to my great-grandmother as much as I should have, or would have liked. I didn’t even get the chance to discuss this project with her or talk about her Buddhist practice, and I never got to show her our Bon Odori choreography as she had been an accomplished Bon Odori dancer herself (though the latter might have been for the best, as I’m not sure I could have handled her criticism).

It was bittersweet to have this time in Makawao to remember my great-grandmother, and to learn more about her life after her death. My heart swelled with love and reverence, but ached with the regret that I was just learning all this now.

During Obon, I wore a happi coat she had fashioned from old cotton tenugui from the temple as well as her wheel of dharma pendant that I inherited from her. Perhaps I was playing dress-up to feel closer to her and try to dispel the remorse I had, but it was easy to focus on my love for her and just enjoy it. I was able

Bonbu Stories

Continued from Page 9

to dance to our song through my tears of joy and sorrow, and danced with my brother and my second cousins for the first time.

It was so special to have so much of my extended family witness “Lantern Song.” They’re definitely biased, but our song and Bon Odori brought my grandmother to tears as she thought I would have made my great-grandmother proud, and the song impressed and resonated with my aunties and uncles. I felt so embraced by my family, my Bonbu Stories family, and our new temple family that the grief was easy to swallow.

‘Lantern Song’ Impact

In a BCA Music Committee interview in 2023 with Rev. Kodani and Nobuko Miyamoto, Miyamoto said that we need to remember that “(Obon) is a space created by our ancestors that we are stepping into,” that the generations before us who kept the tradition of Obon alive during World War II as

well as our direct ancestors who have passed more recently are the reason why Obon is possible today and why it needs to continue, and why we were even able to make ‘Lantern Song’ in the first place. Obon is about death; who would we be without our dead loved ones? Where would we be without our ancestors, or without remembering them? Who will remember us when we die?

Miyamoto goes on to say, however, that while this is a space created by our ancestors, “We’re going to make it our own, one way or another.”

We had been nervous about adding our work to the troves of Obon songs and respecting tradition while maintaining our voice, but a year on from the start of our tour, I do think we were able to accomplish what Miyamoto was talking about.

We combined our gratitude, reverence, remembrance and grief into something that was uniquely us and nontraditional yet still resonant with people of all ages by capturing the essence of Obon.

This past year has shown

me that grief has been so much better as a shared meal, a potluck of everyone’s mourning brought to the table to digest over laughter, family, friends, love and art.

The lyrics from “Lantern Song” are a dialogue between ourselves and our ancestors, but sharing and performing it felt like a dialogue between us as Bonbu Stories and our community.

I didn’t realize how special it was to be able to talk about death and loss with family and strangers alike without fear of being judged or rejected until the summer ended.

Perhaps this is what I’ve been missing all my life being nearly 300 miles from the closest Buddhist temple, and if so, I’m a bit jealous and looking for ways to stay connected beyond this project.

Regardless of whether or not we’ll continue to perform “Lantern Song,” or if it continues to be played at Obons in the years to come, I’ll carry this experience with me as long as my grief continues to be present, be it a snack or a meal fit for sharing.

Winter Seminar

Continued from Page 5

baseball player Shohei Ohtani’s dog Decoy as an example of being well-trained when Ohtani threw the ceremonial first pitch before the baseball game to Decoy. Ohtani trained Decoy to “catch” the baseball in his mouth and then run to Ohtani, who was on the pitcher’s mound.

She said the scholars at Nishi Hongwanji returned to the sutras for clarification and to the main teachers for their writings of the Dharma. The writings of Honen Shonin, Shinran Shonin and Rennyo Shonin were revisited and examined for their contextual correct understanding, which we follow today.

Rev. Dr. Wondra stressed that ministers do not create

or generate new teachings. The Kangaku and Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha follow the teachings described in sutras, the “Pure Land Sutra,” “Contemplation Sutra,” “Amida Sutra,” and the writings of the Seven Masters, Shinran Shonin and Rennyo Shonin. The teachings are based on this core and significant documents.

The seminar concluded with a question-and-answer session and a resounding request from the audience to revisit this issue and to discuss further to assure our understanding of the Jodo Shinshu teachings are correct.

In much gratitude to the Winter Pacific Seminar co-sponsors IBS and CBE, co-hosts Southern District Minister’s Association and the Southern District Buddhist Education Committee, the seminar’s presenters and to all of the participants.

President’s Message

Continued from Page 4

joined the BCAEF staff to work with Executive Director **Hide Mizuno** as the Development Director, overseeing Dharma Forward and the broad range of development activities that support the BCA and IBS.

In 2023, **Hitomi Kuwaha** joined the development team to provide administrative support for the processing and acknowledgement of donations.

It has also spurred an organizational structure within the BCA that is based on the four areas of focus that have become the Dharma Forward Pillars: Buddhist Education (**Jim Pollard** and **Carl Yanari**); Technology and Outreach (**Brad Ito** and **Rick Kawamura**); Ministerial Support and Scholarship (**Rev. Dr. Kenji Akahoshi** and **Dr. Lisa Tsuchitani**); and Facili-

ties (**Kyle Yamasaki**).

It has also spawned the Dharma Forward Allocation Board (DFAB), chaired by **Charlene Grinolds**, which oversees applications for use of Dharma Forward donations designated for the BCA. DFAB ensures that there is accountability and transparency in the designation and use of these funds.

Dharma Forward Giving

With the campaign coming to a close at the end of 2025, we invite you to join in finishing this campaign strong.

If you have already contributed, we thank you wholeheartedly and we encourage you to contribute again to continue the programs and initiatives that have been started. If you are considering a donation for the first time, now is the perfect time to do so. Pledges with contributions over time are a wonderful way to help achieve the goal.

For more information,

please contact Michiko Inanaga (minanaga@bcahq.org), who can help direct your questions to the appropriate professionals.


Every gift, no matter the size, plays a role in shaping the future for Shin Buddhism in America. Thank you for being part of this journey.

As the late Rev. Dr. Seigen Yamaoka stated, in his last JCoD meeting in November 2023, it was his hope that Dharma Forward be the name of fundraising for BCA forever into the future. The campaign’s end is just the ending of this phase of Dharma Forward.

Let us acknowledge Yamaoka Sensei’s wish for a successful completion to this phase of Dharma Forward and be ready to ensure that the Dharma will continue to move forward for the future of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in America.

Now is the time to make it all happen!

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Rev. Takata

Continued from Page 2

solve anything completely. I genuinely wish to help those affected, but I often feel powerless in the fact of such a significant natural disaster.

When I contemplate my deep-rooted ego along with human abilities and limitations, I understand why Dharmakara Bodhisattva established the Primal Vow to liberate all beings from afflictions, pain and suffering. Shinran Shonin teaches us to entrust ourselves to the Great Compassion of Amida Buddha, rather than relying solely on the limited compassion of

humans.

Let us extend our deepest condolences to the victims and families who were affected by the disaster. At the same time, let us sincerely receive and accept the Compassionate Working of Amida Buddha, who is always concerned for us and continually calls out to us. In response, let us live our lives to the utmost, hearing Namoamidabutsu and receiving the working of the Buddha’s Infinite Wisdom and Compassion as it is.

Please remember that the West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple is a spiritual home for all beings. If you need any help, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Town Hall

Continued from Page 7

listening, but we have to kind of build up to a foundation of the teachings in our life. And that means listening, coming to service, listening to Dharma talks or maybe taking a class or reading books, talking about it with fellow Sangha members and then all that kind of builds over time.

“We begin to see it in our everyday life or we might have a life experience that all of a sudden brings it to the forefront,” he said. “Sometimes it’s quite a dramatic kind of experience and sometimes it’s just sort of a gradual process.”



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今月の法話

「お釈迦さまと親鸞聖人」



Rev. Dr. Mutsumi Wondra

オレンジ郡仏教会

開教使 ワンドラ睦

四月と言えばお釈迦
さまのお誕生日を祝う「花祭り法要」が各寺
院でお勤めされます。

オレンジ郡仏教会では白い像の上に花御堂をつくって、誕生直後のシッタッタが「天上天下唯我独尊」と言われているお姿に甘茶をかけて「花祭り法要」をお勤めします。

お釈迦さまの生い立ち

お釈迦さまはネパールとインドの国境にあるヒマラヤのふもとに住んでいたシヤカ族の王子として、紀元前6世紀半ばにルンビニーで誕生され、紀元前5世紀末に、そこから少し東南にいったクシナガラ村はずれのサラ樹林のなかで80歳の生涯を閉じられた方です。当時シヤカ族の最高リーダーであったスッドーダナ（浄飯王・じょうぼんのう）を父とし、同じシヤカ族に属するコリーヤ族の王族出身の

マヤー（摩耶夫人・まやぶにん）を母として誕生されました。

本名はゴータマ・シッタッタといい、29才

のとき人生に多くの疑問を抱いて出家され、6年にわたる厳しい苦行ののち、ガ

ヤの町はずれのウルヴェーラ村の菩提樹の下で悟りの境地に達して生死の迷いを

超脱し、永遠なる真実にめざめた方（ブツ

ダ）となりました。

それは35歳の12月8



日の暁のことだといわれています。そのときからこの土地をブツダガヤとよび、シッタッタは仏陀、如来、釈尊、釈迦牟尼などの尊称でよばれるようになりました。ルンビニーが肉体の誕生地なら、ブツダガヤは、めざめたるもの、仏陀としての第二の誕生地であるといえましょう。それから80歳まで45年の間、人々の苦悩を取り除くため伝道活動をして、ついにクシナガラで入滅されました。

仏陀（ブツダ）の意味

釈迦、釈尊、またシャーキヤムニとは釈迦族出身の聖者という意味の尊称を中国風に略したものです。仏陀（ブツダ）とは、ブツド（めざめる）から転じて、永遠な真実にめざめた方という意味です。真にめざめたものは、迷いの世に生きるものをめざめさせるはたらきがあるので、めざめさせる方という意味をもっています。仏陀（ブツダ）のことを如来ともいい、その原語はタターガタ（tata gata）という言葉で、如去と如来の二つの意味をもっています。如去とは「如に去（ゆ）けるもの」、如来は「如より来るもの」という意味です。「如」（タター）とは、「あるがまま」ということです。人間は自己中心の虚妄分別にもとづいて、自分に都合の良いものに愛着し、都合の悪いものを憎悪して、愛憎の世界を虚構していますが、「あるがままの世界」は、そうした人間の我執煩惱の手垢のつかないところで厳然とあるのです。そのような煩惱を超えた真実の世界は、人間が為すところの自他の分別、愛憎の分別、美醜の分別、善悪の分別、生死の分別、是非といった二元的な対立を超えているので一如、真如、法性、実相、涅槃などとよばれます。それは私たちの虚妄分別を絶し、生死なく、愛憎なく、美醜なく、是非善悪もない言葉では説明が出来ない絶対無限の世界なので空（くう）ともよばれます。しかし、決して何も無いということではなく、言葉を超越した境地であるシュンニヤタ（nyata）ともよばれます。このように仏陀は般若（ブラジュニヤル無分別智）と呼ばれる智慧をもち、あるがままの境地である如を体得し、「めざめたもの」となられたので、仏陀とは「如去」（如にゆけるもの）といわれるのです。

しかし仏陀は、いつまでもこの如の境地にひたつてい

「如」の境地から俗世間に出現して虚妄分別と我執煩惱に苦しむ人々をめざめさせる教主としての仏陀のことを「如来」（如より来るもの）とよびます。お釈迦さまは、まさにこのような意味において人間界で初めて仏陀となられた方なのです。

親鸞聖人にとってのお釈迦さまの出現とは

釈尊入滅から1,700年近く経った12世紀後半に宗祖親鸞聖人は誕生されました。親鸞聖人にとってお釈迦さまの出現はどのような意義があるのでしょうか？『浄土和讃』には、「久遠実成阿弥陀仏 五濁の凡愚をあはれみて 釈迦牟尼仏としめしてぞ 迦耶城（がやしやう）には応現（おうげん）する」（『註釈版』572頁）とあり、親鸞聖人は劫濁・見濁・煩惱濁・衆生濁・命濁という五つの濁りの現世に生きる私たちを哀れんで、無始以来の阿弥陀仏のはたらきを示すためにお釈迦さまは人間界に出現されたと考えられています。

『教行信証』教巻では、お釈迦さまがこの世に誕生された理由（出世本懷）は阿弥陀仏の本願が説かれた『大無量寿経』を説くためであり、「正信念仏偈」においても「如来（釈尊）、世に興出したまふゆえんは、ただ弥陀の本願海を説かんとなり、五濁悪時の群生海は、まさに如来の如実のみことを信すべし」と示されています。（『註釈版』二〇三頁）

「二河白道」では、東（此岸）から西（彼岸）に向かう一人の旅人が火河と氷河に閉ざされたとき、此岸である娑婆世界におられるお釈迦さまが「なんじこの道をゆけ」と目の前にある幅が4,5寸しかない白道をすすめる発遣（はつけん）の声がして、その直後に「汝一心正念にして直ちに來れ」と阿弥陀さまからの招喚（しょうかん）の声が西方浄土から聞こえてきます。旅人は二尊の声に従って阿弥陀さまのご本願を聞法して、念仏する白道を歩みはじめるのです。善導大師によるこの有名な二河白道の譬えは、お釈迦さまは私たちを阿弥陀さまの教えに導いてくださる教主（きようしゆ）であり、阿弥陀さまはこの私を救ってくださる救主（きゆうしゆ）であることが描かれています。親鸞聖人はこのことを『尊号真像銘文』において「帰命」とは、釈尊と阿弥陀仏の二尊の仰せのままにその招きにしたがうという言葉である」（『註釈版』六五六頁参照）と示されています。

二尊一教（にそんいつきやう）の法門

このように釈尊・阿弥陀仏の二尊による巧みな教化に導かれて、信心歓喜と報恩感謝の念仏の生活に恵まれたことを親鸞聖人は、「釈迦・弥陀は慈悲の父母 種々に善巧方便（ぜんぎようほうべん）し われらが無上の信心を 発起せしめたまひけり」（『高僧和讃』善導讃、『註釈版』591頁）と示して二尊を讃えられています。

通常、真宗寺院のお内陣にはお釈迦さまのお姿はありませんが、阿弥陀さまと私たちのあいだに「浄土三部経」の四つの巻物経典が向卓（むこうじよく）にあります。お釈迦さまが私たちに向けて説いてくださる「浄土三部経」がお釈迦さまのお姿といえるでしょう。花祭り法要に寄せて、阿弥陀さまの教えに出遇えたようごびをお釈迦さまに感謝いたしますししょう。

合掌



南カリフォルニア山火事災害基金

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発行所
米国仏教団
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総長メッセージ 仏教とコメディ

米国仏教団総長 原田 マービン



Bishop Rev. Marvin Harada

最近、日本人の女性でスタンダップ・コメディアンをしている方とお会いしました。最初に紹介されたとき、「えっ、日本の女性でスタンダップ・コメディをするの?」と驚きました。

彼女の名前はミシェル・マリザキさんで、インターネットで彼女のコメディを観ることが出来ます。これからますます活躍されることを願っています。

マリザキさんのジョークのひとつに、ロケット科学者の夫の話があります。「私の夫は白人のロケット科学者です」と彼女は言います。「でも、彼はほとんど喋らないんです。私たちは円グラフを使ってコミュニケーションをとります。」

コメディのジョークはどこから思いつくのか聞いてみると、「日常の出来事から自然に生まれてきます」と答えてくれました。私も法話の内容を考えると、日常生活の中からお話を見つけるので、その点で共感しました。振り返ってみると、私が好きなコメディアンたちも、みな日常の出来事を題材にしています。ジェリー・サインフェルドはその代表格です。彼の人気番組『サインフェルド』は、「何もないこと」についての番組だと言われていますが、それはつまり、イレイン、ジョージ、クレイマーなどのジェリーの友人たちとの日常の些細な出来事を描いているということです。

たとえば、彼らが中華料理店で席が空くのを待ち続けるエピソードがあります。それを観て、「あるある」と共感した人も多いでしょう。なぜなら、誰もが似たような経験をしたことがあるからです。

人生において、ユーモアのセンスを持つことはとても大切です。笑うことは心にも身体にも良い影響を与えます。そして、それは仏教の教えにも通じることです。私たちは、自分の愚かさやエゴに気づいたとき、それを笑い飛ばせるくらいの余裕を持つことが大切なのです。

たとえば、家の中でメガネを必死に探していたら、実はずっと頭の上に乗っていたとか。大事なベースボールキャップが見つからず、家族の誰かがどこかに持っていたのではないかと疑っていたら、実は自分で車の中に置き忘れていたとか。こうしたちょっとした勘違いは、日常の中にあふれています。人の失敗を見て笑ってしまうこともあります。が見えるのは、自分の中にも同じような部分があるからかもしれません。

曉鳥敏師は、このようなお話を書かれています。あるとき、僧侶たちが「お布施が少なすぎる」と愚痴をこぼしていたそうです。すると師は、「自分たちがケチだからこそ、お布施が少ないと感じるのではないか」と指摘しました。自分がケチだと、他人がケチなことに気づくし、自分がケチではなかったら、他人がケチだとも気づかないものだ、と言われます。

私たちは、他人の欲深さや怒りに気づくことがあります。でも、それは自分の中にも同じものがあるからこそ目に入るのではないのでしょうか。「自分はあんなに怒ることはない」と思っている、実際に怒りに支配されているとき、自分の姿はなかなか見えないものです。

私自身、子どもが小さかったころにこんな経験をしました。ある日、子どもを叱っていたとき、ふと鏡に映る自分の姿が目に入りました。そこにいたのは、ものすごい形相で怒っている自分でした。「こんな顔をして怒っていたのか……」と思うと、なんとも言えない気持ちになりました。

自分の姿を客観的に見ることは、時に笑いを生み、時に痛みを伴います。親鸞聖人は、自らの内面を深く見つめ、自分のエゴの大きさを悟りました。そして同時に、それを照らし出す仏法の光の深さも感じ取ったのです。

仏法の光があるからこそ、自分の愚かさ気づくことができるのです。

自分の未熟さや愚かさ直面したとき、それを恥じたり腹を立てたりするのはなく、笑って受け入れることができたなら、それは成長の第一歩になるのではないのでしょうか。

そう考えると、スタンダップ・コメディを観ることは、ただの娯楽ではなく、自分自身を見つめる良い機会になるかもしれません。

開教使会会議がオンラインで

2025年の開教使会会議は、2月21日にオンラインで開催された。各教区や委員会からの報告に加え、10月に予定されている得度やBCAガイドブックに関する報告が行われた。今回の主催は桑港教区で、BCA総会は翌週の2月28日・29日に、同じくオンラインで開催された。

2026年の開教使会議は西北部教区が主催し、2月に対面形式で行われる予定。



Ministers Meeting

ベニス本願寺仏教会が創立65周年

3月9日(日)、ベニス本願寺仏教会(クオン・コーリー開教使)において、創立65周年記念法要が厳修された。

法要は稚児行列から始まり、原田マーヴィン総長と初代駐在開教使の松林ジョーシ師が法話を勤めた。法要後はベニス・ジャパニーズ・コミュニティセンターへ移動し、祝賀昼食会が開催された。昼食会では、寺院の歴史を振り返るビデオの上映や、「グレイトフル・クレイン・アンサンブル」による公演が行われた。

参加者の一人は、「一人はお寺が65年もの間存続し、念仏の教えを聴聞できたことは本当に幸せなことです。これからの35年、100周年に向けて、お寺をさらに盛り立てていきたいです」と感慨深く語った。



Rev. Matsubayashi, Rev. Miyaji, Rev. Iwohara and Rev. Quon

訃報

織田ハロルド名誉開教使(99)が、3月9日、カリフォルニア州ロサンゼルスにて、往生の素懷をとげられた。1966年に開教使を拝命した織田師はそのご生涯を通じて、ニューヨーク仏教会、ホワイトリバー仏教会、トライステート／デンバー仏教会、ロサンゼルス本派本願寺仏教会、西ロサンゼルス仏教会、ベニス本願寺仏教会で開教に従事された。後日、プライベートの葬儀が営まれる予定。

ダイヤルザダルマとポッドキャストで聴聞

電話で聴聞ができるプログラム「ダイヤルザダルマ」がポッドキャストでも聞くことができるようになった。(800) 817-7918に電話すると、原田総長の声で音声ガイドが始まる。英語の法話を聞きたい人は1を、日本語は2、スペイン語は3を押すと、それぞれの言語で約5分間の法話を聴聞できる。英語は原田総長のメッセージ、日本語は日本語スピーカーの開教使によるメッセージ、スペイン語は英語のメッセージをスペイン語に訳したものになっている。法話は毎週水曜日午後1時に更新される予定。

ポッドキャストで聴聞したい方は、BCAのウェブサイト<https://www.buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/podcasts>やスマートフォン用のポッドキャストアプリなどで聞くことができる。(ポッドキャストの使用方法が分からない方は、みなさんのお寺の開教使に聞いてみてください。)