

Bishop Eric Matsumoto
Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii
Hawaii Betsuin 2018 New Year's Message (website version)

Bishop Matsumoto presented this dharma message at Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin's New Year's service on January 1, 2018.

Interdependency and Harmony

As we start the New Year, on behalf of the entire Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, please allow me to express my warmest Aloha and Best Wishes to you for a joyous and harmonious 2018. A very Happy New Year to one and all!

Today, along with my best wishes, I also want to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to so many of you for your support, dedication and commitment which enables the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii to continue sharing the Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha, the Dharma in general, and to be an integral part of the larger community all across the State of Hawaii and even beyond Hawaii as our Hawaii efforts are making an impact even on the mainland and in Japan. To the membership, please have pride in the positive sense of the word that our tiny organization in the middle of the Pacific Ocean seems to be making a difference. May we continue to respond in gratitude to Amida Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion!

The 2018 Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii Theme and Slogan is "*Embrace Change: Harmony (Accept Differences)*." It encourages us to accept differences and live in harmony with each other, but when I deeply reflect this is most challenging, due to our self-centered tendencies whether as an individual, one ethnic race, nation, religion and even as humankind. However, I would like to emphasize that we are continually being nurtured and encouraged by the Buddha-Dharma to live harmoniously and with mutual respect for one another. In the eyes of some people, accepting differences may seem like a weakness, but on the contrary, it requires deep insight and inner strength. As of last year, there are two additions in the altar area of the Hawaii Betsuin temple main sanctuary. There are two new panels depicting a phoenix (which is said to appear on auspicious occasions) and the so named Two-Headed Bird. The Two-Headed Bird, or Gumyocho, is found in the upper left panel of the altar. The symbol of the Two-Headed Bird sends a strong message stressing the importance of interdependence. I

hope that the depiction of the Two-Headed Bird does not remain only as a decorative symbol in the altar, but becomes a poignant reminder, each time we see it, of the importance of interdependence and living in harmony.

Our 25th Spiritual Leader His Eminence Gomonshu Kojun Ohtani is especially emphasizing the principle of interdependency. He shares,

“Everything in this world exists based on interdependency. When we are not aware of this, we tend to think to ourselves that our own perspective is the only one that is right and justified. This is what causes conflicts to arise.”

“How then, do we attain (the) peace that we seek in the world today?”

“...it is necessary that we first treat others with the same care and respect that we would show ourselves.”

“The weakness of our relationships with each other is the result of us thinking about ourselves more than others.”

Truly, interdependency and the profound consequences of realizing interdependency could be a key that brings about true harmony and peace in the world. Interdependency is very basic to Buddhist Teaching.

In our Jodo Shinshu Teachings, this principle of interdependency, the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of all things including people and relationships, is evident even in the Vows of Amida Buddha. Have you noticed how each of Amida Buddha’s 48 Vows contains the phrase “If...(such and such is not so), may I not attain the perfect Enlightenment”? For example, in the 18th Vow, it says,

“If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters (that is you and I, all of us) who, with sincere and entrusting heart, aspire to be born in my (Pure) land and say my name even ten times, should not be born in the Realm of Enlightenment, may I not attain the perfect enlightenment.”

In this way, Amida Buddha conditions the Buddha’s own perfect enlightenment with the perfect enlightenment of every other life. This is the astounding awareness to which Shinran Shonin became aware of 800 years ago and our Spiritual Leaders of Jodo Shinshu such as our current Spiritual Leader His Eminence Gomonshu Kojun Ohtani shares with us.

Let’s reflect on the words of Gomonshu that I shared earlier in which he says, *“The weakness of our relationships with each other is the result of us thinking about ourselves more than others.”* My tendency is to put myself first, but

Amida Buddha does the complete opposite by equally valuing this foolish “I” and offers enlightenment to me, unconditionally, to the point of even saying if you don’t attain enlightenment then my own (the Buddha’s) enlightenment is not complete! In this way, Ultimate Compassion incorporates into it the Wisdom or Truth of Interdependence and seeks the peace and happiness of all life. This is the message of Jodo Shinshu that even this most self-centered and limited “I” can attain perfect enlightenment through Amida Buddha’s Compassion. How joyous and significant! After all, there is hope! A joyous hope! The hope brought forward by Namo Amida Butsu. However, what is important is the awareness of the relationship, the connection between Amida Buddha and each one of us. The question that must be asked is, “Do you see your personal relationship with Amida Buddha?”

Interdependence is not difficult to understand, but when truly understood by the heart-and-mind and actualized in our behaviors and actions, lifestyle or life, it can have profound consequences which can transform our lives and thus the world we live in too. However, let us not understand interdependence with our intellect only, but also feel it with our hearts. Just as Amida Buddha’s Compassion should not be comprehended only emotionally, but we should also be aware of the deep profound insight and truth upon which it is based. Let us become fully aware of both Amida Buddha’s Wisdom and Compassion!

Together with becoming aware of the Principle of interdependency important are the virtues that arise from that awareness. Again, challenging as it may be, we are being nurtured and encouraged by the Buddha-Dharma to extend kindness and respect to others based on an understanding of the Wisdom and Truth of Interdependency. I clearly see this in the wise counsel given to us by Prince Shotoku who pointed out “The Value of Harmony” in his 17 Article Constitution over 1400 years ago. In his day, the Prince was challenged with uniting a politically fractured nation. The Prince stated,

“Let us cease from wrath and refrain from angry looks. Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us.”

“We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary people. How can any person lay down a rule by which to distinguish right from wrong? For we are all, one with another, wise and foolish, like a ring which has no end.”

“Sincerely revere the Three Treasures. The Three Treasures are: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.”

“There is no age in which people cannot find the Dharma to be noble. Those who are extremely wicked are few, but when they are taught the Dharma, they can follow it. Unless they align themselves with the Three Treasures, on what basis can they correct their mistaken ways?”

The Dharma describes the Sangha as,

“Thousands of people may live in a community, but it is not a true community until everyone knows each other and has empathy for one another. A true community has faith and wisdom that illuminate it. It is place where people know and trust one another and there is harmony. In fact, harmony is the life and essence of a true community or organization.”

Today, I would boldly like to suggest that we apply this concept of Sangha to our whole world community.

In this way, especially if we are Buddhists as the Sangha, we are continually being encouraged to avail ourselves to the Wisdom and Compassion of Enlightenment and aspire for the ideals set forth in the Dharma or Teachings. By the way, if you haven't seen the latest Star Wars movie *The Last Jedi*, I found it delightfully filled with Buddhist principles and thoughts including interdependency. Maybe I shouldn't say anymore so I don't spoil it for you, but in one of the scenes, Rey, one of the main characters, is reflected endlessly in time and space.

In 2018, with our hearts and minds illuminated and nurtured by the Light of Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion, may the virtues of humility, self-reflection, mutual respect, non-violence, and equality arise and may we be able to contribute, even in some small way, towards a more peaceful, compassionate and harmonious world. Truly, as Shinran Shonin said, *“May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha's Teachings spread!”*

To conclude, again, to one and all, may I wish you a very Happy New Year and I humbly ask for your continued support and cooperation, but most of all let us, one and all, be guided by Amida Buddha/All-Inclusive Wisdom and inspired by All-Embracing Compassion.

Namo Amida Butsu