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Address:

1151 W Leland Ave.
Chicago, IL
60640-5043

Telephone:

773-334-4661

Online:

BuddhistTemple
Chicago.org

Resident Minister

Rev. Patti Nakai

President

Bill Bohlman

Ask Your Karma: Follow the Indescribable Self

On St. Patrick's Day, our temple hosted ONE-Northside's clergy breakfast, attended by about thirty religious leaders from groups throughout the north side of the city. They asked me to open the gathering with words from the Buddhist tradition but I always feel stuck when asked to "give a prayer"—whether before a meal or at a protest event. After some pondering, I decided to use the words of Soga Ryojin that Rev. Michael Conway shared with us at BTC's March 11 Spring Ohigan seminar. My paraphrase of what Rev. Mike said:

A man came to Soga-sensei to ask, "Sensei, what should I be doing with my life? The words of the Buddha and the great teachers only give me general guidelines for living, but I need to know more specifically what I should be doing with my life." Soga answered, "Don't ask me—ask your karma."

Rev. Mike explained this as Soga telling the man that instead of analyzing things with one's limited reasoning or the limited reasoning of anyone else, he should be listening to the wisdom coming from the Unbounded Light and Life (Amida). And the way to access this wisdom is to "Ask your karma"—to see how

Here Is What It Means

Shortly after I started coming to BTC, Hana Matsuri happened to fall on the same Sunday as Easter. Although I had stopped being a Catholic many years before, it seemed odd to be in a Buddhist temple on Easter. Rev. Ashikaga told the story of the Buddha's birth, of his emerging from his mother's side, taking seven steps and proclaiming his birth cry. Then Rev. Ashikaga said, "Of course it didn't happen this way, but here is what it means." A few years later, Rev. Taitetsu Unno gave a seminar at BTC. He opened by telling a story about his mother's final days. He recounted how her sister comforted her by saying soon she would join her husband in the Pure Land. His mother replied, "No such place." Rev. Unno then explained what he felt the Pure Land means.

The Larger Sutra tells the story of Dharmakara, a king who wishes to become a Buddha. After meditating for five kalpas, he formulates the forty-eight vows which will lead to his enlightenment. Upon fulfillment of these vows, he is the Amida Buddha. It is a wonderful story; yet, only a story until we delve into what it means.

The only practice necessary is the nembutsu; Namu Amida Butsu. What is meant by this?



Rev. Patti Nakai
Resident Minister

For more writings
by Rev. Nakai,
visit her blog,
*Taste of Chicago
Buddhism*, at:
tinyurl.com/chibud

This article
continues
on page 7
at column 1.



Bill Bohlman
BTC President

Contact Bill at
budtempchi@aol.com
or find him most
Sundays after
service at the
information desk
& bookstore.

This article
continues
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MAY 2017 Temple Events & Activities Guide

- See Calendar (page 8) for specific dates.
- Up-to-date details/last-minute changes are available on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/budtempchi
- **ALL EVENTS ARE FREE, OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, and held at the Temple (unless otherwise noted).**

➤➤➤ Special Temple Services and Events <<<

- May 20—**Jeff Wilson** (author: *Buddhism of the Heart*) Seminar.
- May 21—**Tanjo-e** (Shinran Shonin's Birthday)
- May 28—**Hatsu Mairi** (welcoming children to Sangha)

Regular Temple Services

- **Religious Service** (in English)—Sundays, 11 am.
- **Lay Speaker Sunday**—Usually 3rd Sunday every month, 11 am.

Temple Meetings & Community Service

- **Bulletin mailing**—2nd to last Friday every month, 10 am; volunteers welcome. This month: May 19.
- **Bulletin submissions**—Deadline for notices and articles: every month, 6 pm, the Thursday 15 days prior to mailing. This month: May 4.
- **Temple Board Meeting**—Once a month, Sunday, 12:30 pm. This month: May 28.
- **Upaya Helpers** (refreshment service, community outreach, ping pong, etc.) Call Candy Minx for info: 312-618-0880.
- **Cook It Forward** (feeding unhoused persons)—Mary Harvey <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CookItForward/>

Meditation & Buddhist Education

- **Buddhism Study Class**—Wednesdays, 7 to 8:30 pm.

- **Dharma School** (children's Sunday school)—2nd and 4th Sundays, 11 am. This month: May 14 and 28.
- **Introduction to Buddhism**—offered periodically throughout the year. E-mail Rev. Nakai at rev.eshin.patti23@gmail.com.
- **Meditation**—Sundays, 9:00 am and Thursdays, 7:30 pm. First-timers: come 10 minutes early for instruction.
- **Sutra Study Class**—2nd or 3rd Sunday of the month, 12:30 to 2 pm. No previous Buddhism study required.

Social & Cultural Activities

- **Asoka Society** (refreshment service, social club, outings, etc.)—3rd Saturday every month, 1 pm.
- **Book Club**—One night a month. This month: title to be announced, date and time to be determined.
- **Iaido** (Japanese Swordsmanship)—Mondays, 7-9 pm.
- **Kumihimo** (Japanese braiding). May 13. Email Nancey Epperson: naepperson14@gmail.com.
- **Movie Night**—One Tuesday night a month. This month: *Kubo*, May 23 Tuesday at 6:30pm.
- **Qigong** (Chinese Movement)—Tuesdays, 11-12:30pm. Call Dennis Chan 312-771-6087 for info.
- **Taiko** (BTC Kokyo Taiko Drum Troupe)—**Adults**, Fridays, 7-9 pm. Email kokyotaiko@yahoo.com to confirm. **Children**, 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sundays at 11. Email sanghacomod@yahoo.com for appointments.

MISSION STATEMENT

Founded in 1944 as an administratively independent temple, The Buddhist Temple of Chicago aspires to the following:

- To present and explore the Three Treasures of Buddhism—the Buddha (teacher), the Dharma (teachings), and the Sangha (community).
- To be guided and inspired by the historical Buddha, Gautama Shakyamuni, and the teachers who have followed—Shinran Shonin, Manshi Kiyozawa, and Haya Akegarasu.
- To present the Buddha-Dharma in a language and manner relevant and understandable in contemporary America.
- To welcome all who seek the Dharma without any exceptions.
- To be a positive presence in our local community working to enhance the vitality of our neighborhood.
- To honor and continue the traditions of our founding members.
- To always live the Nembutsu—Namu Amida Butsu.

BTC BULLETIN

Team Rev. Patti Nakai, Darryl Shishido (Editor), Nancey Epperson, Ann Yi

Feedback & Submissions Questions & comments, corrections & suggestions are welcomed. Submissions are encouraged—articles, essays, book reviews, photos, poetry, news items, announcements, drawings, etc. Submissions are reviewed for suitability and space availability. Anonymous submissions are not published, but author's names may be withheld from publication upon request.

Contact E-mail BTCbuledtr@hotmail.com or speak with anyone on the BTC Team

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- ☸ 3/05 March memorial service. *** Chanting class met.
- ☸ 3/06 Eastern Religions class from Truman College visited BTC.
- ☸ 3/08 BTC hosted 46th Ward Town Hall meeting with alderman James Cappleman.
- ☸ 3/09 Nancey Epperson attended ONE Northside membership meeting at North Shore Baptist Church.
- ☸ 3/11 Spring Ohigan seminar with Rev. Michael Conway of Otani University.
- ☸ 3/12 Kosu-ki (Rev. Gyoko Saito memorial) and Dharma School service. Rev. Conway was the guest speaker. *** Sutra study class met with Rev. Conway. *** Rev. Nakai conducted one-year memorial service for Seiji Matsumoto.
- ☸ 3/13 BTC Dharma School hosted Buddhist parenting workshop with Laurie Lawlor of Lakeside Sangha.
- ☸ 3/14 Rev. Nakai attended monthly Uptown clergy lunch.
- ☸ 3/15 BTC hosted breakfast meeting for the Lathrop Homes task force of the Chicago Housing Initiative. *** Rev. Nakai attended Chicago Japanese American Council meeting in Northbrook.
- ☸ 3/16 Darryl Shishido attended Buddhist Council of the Midwest meeting at Heartland Sangha. *** Rev. Nakai attended reception hosted by the Japan America Society for the new Japan Consul General, Mr. Naoki Ito.
- ☸ 3/17 BTC hosted clergy breakfast meeting for ONE-Northside, attended by leaders of various faiths from Lincoln Park to Rogers Park.
- ☸ 3/18 Asoka Society met.
- ☸ 3/19 Spring Ohigan service. *** Rev. Nakai participated in non-denominational memorial for the late Henry Ozaki at Haben Funeral Home in Skokie. Mr. Ozaki is survived by wife Mary, son Brian and daughter Jennifer.
- ☸ 3/20 Rev. Nakai conducted 7th year memorial for Yasuko Horiuchi at BTC. *** Rev. Nakai conducted cremation service for the late Mrs. Jessie Morisato at Montrose Cemetery chapel. Mrs. Morisato is survived by her daughter Susan.
- ☸ 3/21 Movie night.
- ☸ 3/22 Rev. Nakai was included in group of women religious leaders honored at the Cook County board meeting as part of Women's History Month events. *** Rev. Nakai conducted home memorial service for the late Mrs. Toki Nakagawa. Mrs. Nakagawa is survived by son Teruhiko.

Our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of:

**Jessie Morisato
Toki Nakagawa
Henry Ozaki
Setsue Tando**

- ☸ 3/23 Rev. Nakai and several temple members attended meeting at the Japanese American Service Committee for the Alphawood Gallery upcoming exhibit on the wartime camp experience.
- ☸ 3/24 April bulletin prepared for mailing (mailed out 3/27). *** Rev. Nakai as part of the Chicago Japanese American Council met with Japan Consul General Ito at his office.
- ☸ 3/26 Founder's Day service (Rev. Gyomay Kubose memorial) was chaired by Dharma School students. *** Board of Directors met. *** Rev. Nakai participated in farewell to Rev. Jean Darling service at Peoples Church.
- ☸ 3/27 Rev. Nakai and temple members attended Japanese Mutual Aid dinner meeting at the Japanese American Service Committee.
- ☸ 3/29-30 Temple hosted extras and crew for the TV show "Chicago PD" (episode scheduled to air May 3)
- ☸ We learned that longtime member Mrs. Setsue Tando passed away on March 25. No details were given to BTC about the private family service.

THANK YOU!

Understanding the Nembutsu through recognizing the Paramitas in others. Send in your recognitions!

- **Sunday Service Participants:** Bill Bohlman, Dharma School Students, Lynnell Long, Gary T. Nakai, Michael Nudo, Helene Rom, Darryl Shishido, Elaine Siegel, Nancy Yanagidate
 - **Music/Accompanists:** Drea Gallaga, Ann Yi
 - **Audio Controls:** Wendy and Jacob Fawcett, Gary T. Nakai
 - **Sunday Service Refreshments:** Noreen Enkoji, Haru Ito, Shiozaki Family, Takata Family, Ruby Tsuji, Upaya Group
 - **Bulletin Mailing:** Sue Balsam, Dennis Chan, Antoinette d'Vencets, Noreen Enkoji, Nancey Epperson, Haru Ito, April Kellman, Candy Minx, Alice Murata, Masa Nakata, Sal Ortiz, Evelyn Pudzisz, Helene Rom, Seichi & Cathy Shiraiwa, Ruby Tsuji
 - **Cleaning Temple washrooms:** Anonymous
 - **Taking care of the Temple inside and out:** Tomio Tademoto
 - **Maintaining and updating the Temple computer:** John Kelly, Gary T. Nakai
 - **Maintaining and updating the Temple website:** Ann Yi, Wendy Fawcett
 - **Emptying the trash bins, filling them with new bags and putting them out for disposal:** Sue Balsam, Adam Kellman, Candy Minx, Nancey Epperson, Ruby Tsuji
 - **Cleaning Hondo and Nokotsudo:** Michael Yasukawa
 - **Administrative Office Volunteers:** Ruth Abbinanti, Darryl Shishido, Nancey Epperson, Sue Balsam
- Our apologies to anyone we have failed to include.

Kubo and the Two Strings

by Candy Minx

BTC Movie Night: May 23, 6:30 pm.

“Any time that you are looking outside of your own experiences, you want to make sure to capture it as accurately as possible. So, we did a heavy amount of research, and we brought in a lot of consultants and experts. . . . Art is one of those few things that crosses cultural barriers.” Producer-Director Travis Knight

Something interesting is happening inside the film *Kubo and the Two Strings*. Contemporary critical literature about movies, and especially Disney-animated movies, centers around the ethics of cultural appropriation for commercial gain. Part of the criticism includes the idea that big budget movies recreate stories from cultures outside of Hollywood and cast movie stars rather than historically-accurate actors. Another issue criticized is the stereotyping portrayal and language in these culturally appropriated stories. An example is from Disney’s *Aladdin*, set in a Middle Eastern country, containing a line, “It’s barbaric but, hey, it’s home.” Another film told the story of a Native American child’s encounter with colonizers while Disney portrayed her as a young adult and did not recreate her real-life abduction in the movie *Pocahontas*.

In the movie *Kubo and the Two Strings*, filmmakers have experimented with conflating and hybridizing many folk tales while combining Shintoism and Buddhism, creating a metaphor for how we process grief. The movie shows how cross-cultural communication can heal inter-community conflict. An example of healing through cross-cultural assimilation is the migration of Ullambana. Ullambana is Sanskrit for “deliverance from suffering” and is celebrated on July 15 by making offerings to one’s deceased, and possibly suffering, loved ones. The Indian observance became Bon Odori in Japan and is a very special moment in this film.

The cinematic techniques used to make this film mirror the cross-cultural exploration, combining puppetry, CGI and stop-motion animation. Music plays an important role in this film, too, as the “two strings” mentioned in the film’s title are a “shamisen,”

a Japanese instrument. The interdisciplinary approach used in this film supports and elevates the belief that Art not only transcends cultural and societal conflict but also heals and allows us to transcend personal grief.

Director Travis Knight, inspired by filmmaker Akira Kurosawa and manga artists Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima (who created *The Lone Wolf and the Cub*), has managed to blend ideas from several cultures and created an innovative, ethical folktale for today. Art Parkinson, beloved for playing Rickon Stark in *Game of Thrones*, is the lead here as Kubo. Kubo is a young boy devoted to care-giving his chronically-ill mother. The supporting roles are all voiced with engaging actors, which is important as the audience may not be familiar with “oni” (demons) and “yurei” (ghosts) and “hannya” (women turned into demons). Rooney Mara, known for playing eccentric characters, is perfectly cast as one of the demons. Brenda Vaccaro and George Takei play retired village residents and foils to Kubo. Charlize Theron plays a monkey. The movie has many demons, a giant worm who resides in the moon, and fantastical settings, including a huge beetle-man who seems to be referencing the mythical “Shuten Doji,” voiced by Matthew McConaughey.

This film is stunning, scary and inspiring. It is a masterpiece, but may take time to assimilate. Although the setting is Asian, George Takei is the only featured player with an authentic and historically-accurate background. The film attempts to bridge the gap between borders. Discussion of its failure or achievement will demand thinking about the film’s huge ambitions.



Shamisen

(continued from last month)

Remember the Jay Bees!

by Darryl Shishido

2

Every summer, the Hayashi family invited us to Lake Shaefer in Indiana for a Labor Day weekend retreat. A couple of cabins for the Jay-Bee boys and a couple for the Jay-Bee girls would be rented. We learned to waterski, had hayrides, ate hot dogs and hamburgers cooked on an outdoor grill, roasted marshmallows over a bonfire, gazed at the crowded night sky (a real treat for a city slicker like me), listened day and night on transistor radios to the latest, popular musical hits on the “Silver Dollar Survey” of WLS radio station, and talked endlessly about who we liked and who was going with who.

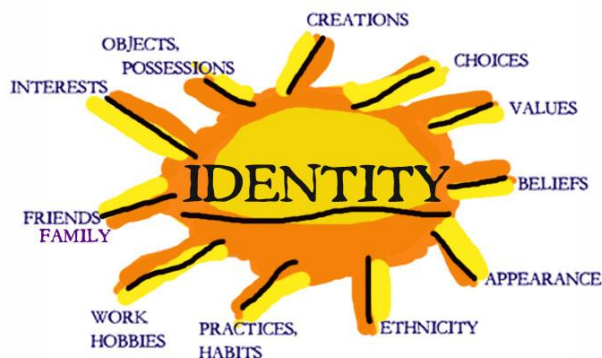
In the 1960's, young people were curious about everything and questioned anything. Years before the world's favorite rock n' roll band, The Beatles, became interested in meditation, one night in the Hayashi's cabin, someone not Buddhist asked Reverend Saito about the subject. Reverend said every Buddhist should have at least some experience of meditation to understand the Buddhism of Buddha himself. The important thing, he said, is to concentrate on your *hara*. I have seen *hara* translated as “center of gravity,” and explained as “the area behind your belly button,” but Reverend Saito said: first, you must tighten your abdominal muscles. To demonstrate this, he had one boy lie down on the cabin floor in front of everyone. While one of his hands gripped a wooden chair for balance and support, he stepped onto the boy's stomach. As soon as Reverend lifted his other foot, the boy released a rather rude and crude sound.

Three times when I was a member the Jay-Bees participated as a group in Buddhist conventions. We hosted the 1968 Eastern Young Buddhist League convention here in Chicago, and visited Cleveland for the 1969 convention and New York for the 1970 convention. The 1968 convention was held at the Intercontinental Hotel on Michigan Avenue, at the same time anti-Vietnam War protestors were disrupting the Democratic Party national convention with demonstrations outside the Conrad Hilton Hotel a couple of blocks south. I attended the convention during the day and watched the riots on television at night.

At our convention, I remember one of the minister-teachers say: Nowadays, everyone talks about “Identity.” For example, a Negro who wants to learn about his “Black Identity” asks himself, “What does it mean, to be “Black”? A Jew who wants to learn about his “Jewish Identity” asks himself, “What does it mean, to be a “Jew”? But also, he reminded us, today university and college professors and students are complaining about feeling regimented, manipulated, exploited by bureaucratic school systems, corporations and governments, alienated from their country, society and State, even from God, or suffering like Simon and Garfunkel in their album of music, *The Sounds of Silence*—we were all suffering from the loss of our “Identity.” Moreover, he reminded us, the first human heart transplant operation had just occurred. The transplant of other vital organs had already occurred. And complex prosthetic limbs were being developed. But if every part of my body can be replaced, where am “I”? And in the hugely popular film of 1968, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, even a gigantic computer seemed to have a distinct personality, a separate, human-like identity. It has taken me a lifetime to realize—in Buddhism, we answer these questions with the concepts of “true self” and *mu-shin*, “No Ego/Self, Mind/Heart or Soul.”

When I attended last year's (2016) O-Bon dance, my first O-Bon since retirement from work, in fact, my first time in decades, I saw Mrs. Tsurusaki. She and her husband Chic had been among the most active Jay Bees adult advisors. She was in a wheelchair now. Maybe she won't remember me, I thought, so I asked her daughter to reintroduce me. She said, “Oh, yes, I remember you. I see your name in **The BTC Bulletin** all the time!” Our adult advisors always knew we youngsters need encouragement.

(To be continued)



The 2017 BTC Scholarship

ELIGIBILITY – Applicant must be a high school senior or an undergraduate senior who has attended The Buddhist Temple of Chicago Dharma School and/or participated in one of the activities of BTC and is a paid member or listed on a family membership two years prior to the scholarship year according to BTC membership records.

SELECTION – The BTC Scholarship will be awarded on the basis of scholastic merit and personal dedication to the Temple with consideration given to individual need.

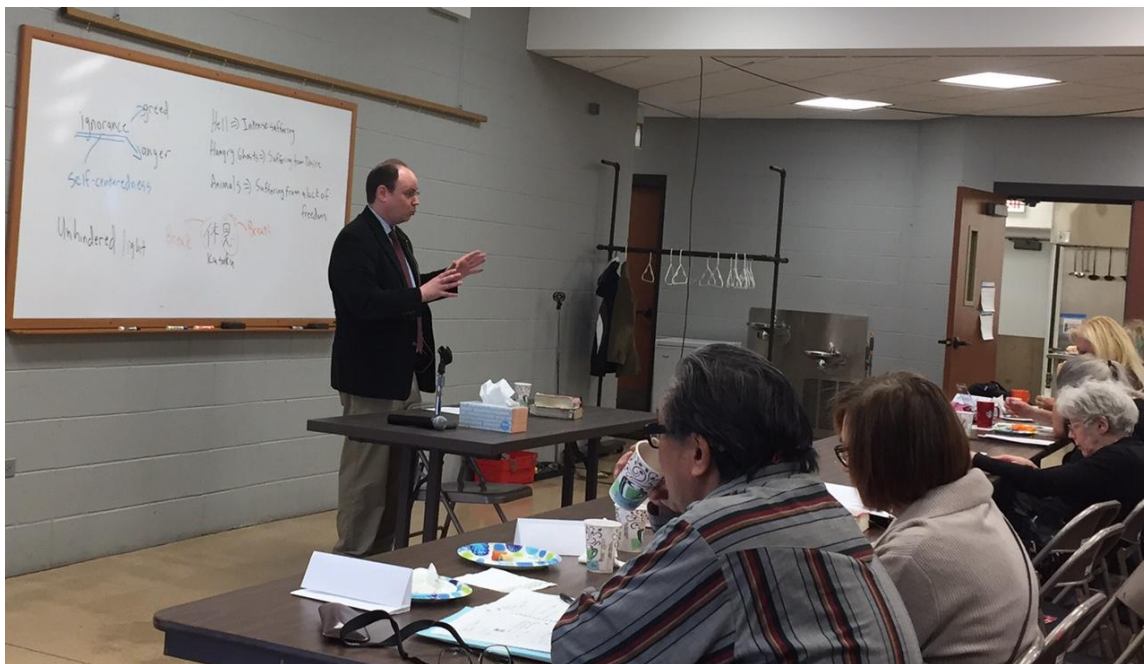
PROCEDURE – An applicant must complete the Scholarship Application, obtain one recommendation, and write a 200-word essay. All applications must be accompanied by a certified transcript of the student's high school grades (if available, or a letter given as to the reason this was omitted). The responsibility for a completed application and submission by the time of the deadline rests solely with the applicant.

OBTAIN SCHOLARSHIP FORM – Contact Rev. Patti Nakai at 773-334-4661 for an application packet.

DEADLINE – Applications must be received by midnight May 30, 2017. All correspondence, forms, inquiries and applications should be sent to:

The BTC Scholarship Committee
c/o The Buddhist Temple of Chicago
1151 W Leland Avenue
Chicago, IL 60640

PRESENTATION – The Buddhist Temple of Chicago Scholarships will be awarded during the BTC Graduation Service on June 11th at 11 AM. Recipients will be notified by e-mail or telephone during the first week in June.



Local Boy Makes Good!

Rev. Mike Conway speaks at O-Higan seminar; see Temple News, page 3, and March BTC Bulletin

Ask Your Karma

(continued from page 1)

how the myriad causes and conditions have brought you to this unique moment here and now.

The people I talked to at the meeting said it made sense to them. What we “should do” is not something we figure out with our heads but it’s something that arises in our guts. And more likely than not, it’s not something we thought we had wanted to do or something that will make us rich, attractive or powerful. But in our guts we hear the grassroots of life—the many lives before, around and following after us.

I think for Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders at that breakfast (there were two Buddhists attendees—Rev. Taigen Dan Leighton and his associate Rev. Laurel Ross from Ancient Dragon Zen Gate), “Ask your karma” meant praying to and listening to a particular being they can call “God,” but in Buddhism “God” is so diffuse, subtle and intricate that we can’t even put a confining label such as “God” on that pervasiveness. For Shinran, it’s enough just to refer to it/they as the “inconceivable” (*fukashigi*).

Rev. Mike in his Dharma talk at the Koshu-ki service (Rev. Gyoko Saito memorial) on March 12, reminded us that the karma that answers our “what should I do?” is manifested in a “self” that is greater than our usual notion of who we are. Rev. Mike expressed his gratitude for the work Rev. Saito did in introducing Akegarasu Haya’s words to the West and pointed in particular to the poem “Who Am I?” from the *Shout of Buddha*. Most of you are already familiar with the poem which we often quote for Koso-ki (Akegarasu’s memorial in August):

My [thought, experience, feeling, will, wish,
etc.] deeds are deeds;

They are never myself.

I had thought that my deeds are myself,

But now I'm aware I made a terrible mistake.

But then who am I?

Yes, it is true, that through thought,
experience,

Feeling, will, wish, and deed

I manifest myself, but also I manifest myself

When I break out of all of these.

I am not such a limited self,

Conceptualized self,

As to exist apart from others!

I alone am the most noble:

I cannot in speaking or writing put down who I
am!

I always touch this indescribable self,

Always follow this indescribable self.

For Rev. Mike who first came to our temple as a troubled young man, to hear such words gave him a feeling of great relief. He no longer felt hopelessly trapped in his negative thoughts, feelings and experiences, as he became aware of what was noble, cosmos-embracing and freely manifesting itself through his life. “I’m aware that I made a terrible mistake” is the “Namu” and “an indescribable, subtle existence” is the “Amida Butsu” which includes my life with all other lives.

I can’t answer for you the question of “What should I do?” but I hope these words of Rev. Akegarasu (inspired by his reading of *The Larger Sutra* and Shinran’s teachings) help you to “ask your karma”—to contemplate your past, be aware of the inner and outer environment of your present and see the path which takes you into your future.

Here Is What It Means

(continued from page 1)

Is the nembutsu some type of prayer or a desperate plea for salvation? Or is it something much deeper, an echo within oneself of true entrusting? To know the answer we must know what it means.

How do we find these answers? There are very few who may be able to discern these answers by themselves; most of us are unable to do so. It is only through listening to the teachings and exploring their meanings with others that we are able to grasp the deeper meaning. From the very beginning, BTC has been a place where the teachings come alive. People speak of an “American Buddhism,” a Buddhism that fits our modern society. This is not a Buddhism that abandons what has come before; rather, it is a Buddhism that builds upon the past. Stripping away the cultural overlays, we return to the basics. With respect for the forms and traditions, but not shackled by them, we move ever forward. Together as a Sangha, we awaken to the unbounded light and life. Here is what it means:

Namu Amida Butsu



The Buddhist Temple of Chicago

1151 W Leland Ave
 CHICAGO, IL 60640-5043 USA
www.buddhisttemplechicago.org
 Phone: (773) 334-4661

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BTC CALENDAR MAY 2017

See Temple Events & Activities Guide on page 2 for details on events.
 Events may be canceled or moved after press time due to unforeseen circumstances.
 Check www.facebook.com/budtempchi for the most up-to-date changes.

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 7 pm laido	2 11 am Qi Gong	3 7 pm Study Class	4 6 pm Bulletin Submissions Deadline 7:30 pm Meditation	5 7 pm Taiko	6
7 9 am Meditation 11 am Monthly Memorial	8 7 pm laido	9 11 am Qi Gong	10 7 pm Study Class	11 7:30pm Meditation	12 7 pm Taiko	13 9 am Kumihimo
14 9 am Meditation 11 am Mother's Day/Dharma School	15 7 pm laido	16 11 am Qi Gong	17 7 pm Study Class	18 7:30 pm Meditation	19 10 am Bulletin Mailing 7 pm Taiko	20 10 am Seminar 1 pm Asoka Society
21 9 am Meditation 11 am Tanjo-e (Shinran Shonin's Birthday)	22 7 pm laido	23 11 am Qi Gong	24 7 pm Study Class	25 7:30 pm Meditation	26 7 pm Taiko	27
28 9 am Meditation 11 am Hatsumairi /Dharma School 12:30 pm Board Meeting	29 7 pm laido	30 11 am Qi Gong	31 7 pm Study Class			