

Sono Mama-Just As You Are
Dharma Message by Edith Ushio

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My topic today is sono mama, just as you are, or as defined on the internet, just as it is or just the way it is.

This incident happened yAsears ago in the 1980s when I was teaching math at Kapaa High School. At that time the rule in my class was, like it was in many other classes, that all textbooks had to be covered. For that particular year, it was especially important because this ninth grade basic math class had received new books which had to last for at least six years.

When the books were passed out, the students were told the rule and that they would be given one week to cover their books. They were told that I had available, for their use, many nice bookcovers provided by the Navy and that actually the best bookcovers were those made with paper shopping bags—that my own children liked the shopping bags best. They were also told that those who didn't cover their books by the deadline would not be allowed to take the books out of the classroom until the books were covered.

On the day of the deadline, only one book was not covered—the book assigned to a very tough little girl named Nola, who left her book in the classroom before she left. After a few days, on a Thursday night, I received a phone call from a woman who identified herself as Nola's mother. Expecting to be yelled at or even sworn at, I immediately held the phone away from my ear. However, instead of yelling the woman very nicely asked if her daughter could be allowed to take the book home for the weekend because she (the mother) was getting paid on Friday and Nola could buy a bookcover and have her book covered by Monday. I told the mother about the Navy covers, but she said that it was OK and that Nola would buy a cover.

As expected, on Monday Nola came to class with a very nice cover on her book. After class I asked her why she had to go through so much and buy a bookcover when she could get one free. Her answer left me stunned, sad, and angry at myself for being so unaware. She said that she had to buy a nice

bookcover because if she used a free one, everyone would know that she is poor. I was shocked with Nola's answer! During my more than twenty years of teaching I had never experienced something like this. Nola was not trying to give me a hard time. She did not want to use a free bookcover because she didn't want others to know she was poor! Several years later, after listening to a Dharma message, I thought about the incident with Nola. I thought about the Dharma message and thought that maybe it's expecting too much of a sensitive teenager dealing with the problems of growing up; but if only Nola had been able to accept her situation, she wouldn't have gone through all that she did. Many times we make our already difficult lives more difficult because we spend so much time and energy covering up and making excuses for things that we cannot accept. A good example is my experiences with my thumbs.

I have thumbs that are very different from yours, and for years I was not able to accept my thumbs. From the time that I was very young, I made every effort to hide my thumbs because I was ashamed that I had such ugly thumbs. When my piano teacher one day grabbed one of my thumbs and asked me what happened to my thumb, I wanted to cry. When I went for my driver's license I was very upset when the clerk said, "Wow, your thumb print goes outside the square." Even after my math methods professor in college who had a defect on her arm told us to always tell our students about any defects we have, I could not bring myself to do so. I felt that the only good thing about my thumbs was that in chemistry lab class I could cover the top of a test tube with my thumbs whereas the others had to use their palms. Then one day after I started teaching, at the end of a parent/teacher conference my vice-principal asked why I always hid my thumbs. I realized then that many times I was trying so hard to hide my thumbs that I was not giving my full concentration to the tasks at hand.

The Buddha says "sono mama or just as you are", that he will accept us just as we are. We too should accept ourselves as we are and others and situations as they are. This does not mean that we accept situations as they are and give up. It means that we say "sono mama" and use our energies to move forward from there.

When you students feel overwhelmed and possibly get depressed because your school work is getting difficult and it's so hard to grow up, when you parents and grandparents look at the younger generations and get upset at the things they do, when we begin to

lose our hearing and good health and begin to forget things as we age and go through life with its changes, and when we go through this challenging period of keeping LHM going during the absence of a resident minister, let us try to remember sono mana and not give up but go in the positive direction from there. However, since we're all human beings this is so easy to say but often very difficult to do.

Therefore, as we go through life with its expected good times and bad times, let us think about and try to remember what our ministers have told us many times. Our ministers have told us that we all need Amida Buddha's guidance because we are all human beings with many imperfections. Let us try to accept situations as they are, sono mama or just the way it is, and with Amida Buddha's guidance, go forward.

Thank you for your attention. Namu Amida Butsu