

The Dharma of Mini Golf  
September 2012, Carol Valentine

Two years ago I gave a talk about "The Dharma of Mini Golf" on a day when Dharma School students and teachers were going to play mini golf in Poipu. Today, I'm "going green" and recycling my original Dharma talk about Mini golf, with some updating. Today Dharma School students and teachers will be playing Mini Golf at the new course in Kilauea. We have played at the rooftop course in Poipu but this course is so much cooler and really looks like the mini golf courses I played on growing up.

When I think of Mini-Golf, I think of my own childhood, only then we called it "putt-putt golf." We used to play as a family when I was a little girl. I was always so excited that they actually had really cute little clubs that were the perfect size for me. As a teenager, I had progressed to calling it by the much cooler name of "putty golf." Later, we took our daughter to play occasionally and I even went out to play as an adult with friends at outdoor and indoor courses.

Thinking of Mini-Golf related to Dharma lessons, should be a challenge and a stretch, right? But the idea of the 4 Noble Truths came bounding into my head, which is the way most ideas enter my life. Sometimes they bound in and bound right back out again, but this one stayed. Here are the 4-Noble Truths related to Mini-golf. By the way, the term BIIG comes from Rev. Dr. Ken Tanaka in his book Ocean. We know that isn't how to spell the word BIG, but it is an easy way to remember the 4-Noble Truths.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Noble Truth is that life is difficult; life is a **Bumpy** road because we don't always get what we want and sometimes we get what we don't want; obstacles and difficulties get in our way. Hmmmmm, Mini-Golf is full of obstacles . . . . windmills, castles, water hazards, curves, angles & hills. It's like life because you can't get through the mini golf course without the obstacles (it would be terribly boring if there were not obstacles, right?) and we know we can't get through life without obstacles either. We don't have windmills, castles and water obstacles in life but we do have the economy and friends and our health and relationships and school & tests and life always seems to throw us those curve balls we don't expect. When you think about it, anything unexpected is a curve ball because we can't see it coming. Life and Mini-Golf both have obstacles that we cannot avoid. Challenges are a part of life.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Noble Truth is that there is a cause for the difficulties we encounter . . . . **Impermanence**, our desires, our fears and our need for control. Same for Mini-Golf. It can be frustrating because that silly little golf ball seems to have a mind of its own, no matter where I want it to go. I plan and focus and calculate just exactly how to hit that little ball and it still heads off in the wrong direction. Ever had that happen? Ever had that happen with your children or your spouse or with friends or someone you work with, or just with life? No matter what we do or what we say, they go off in their own direction, life goes off in a different direction than we

had planned. It is so frustrating when people go off in their own direction, especially since we absolutely know we are right. It happens to all of us, right? I have finally started to learn that the only person I can control is myself and I'm not always good at that. I can control myself (not what happens in my life just myself and my reactions) and do the best that I can do. If I try to control someone else, to make them do what I want them to do, I will definitely be disappointed and frustrated. After all, the expectations are mine, not theirs. I have learned to let go of the expectations and the frustration they cause . . . most of the time. That is part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Noble Truth, we are really part of our own suffering because of what we hang on to wanting.

That leads to . . . . .

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Noble Truth, which is the way to put a stop to the frustrations and the difficulties, and no, it is not by living in a cave going nowhere, doing nothing. It is about being **Interdependent**. If we can learn to live in the present and let go of the frustrations and disappointments of the past, we can feel more joy and contentment in our lives. Know what? That's true for Mini-Golf too. I knew I would find another connection! In Mini-Golf, if we can just let go of our frustrations, like, "I can't believe it took me 20 strokes to get that crazy ball in the hole!", and even our feelings of "Wow, I am such an awesome golfer; I can take on anyone!", then we can just play one stroke at a time, one hole at a time. Just like life, there is always hope, we can always get better. Nike was right in their commercial. "Just do it." Just play and have fun. True for Mini-Golf and even more true for life. Enjoy everyday for what it is. Remember the past but don't get stuck there. We are not in charge of what happens to us but we are always in charge of how we react to what happens to us. Our attitude can make all the difference in the world. We can hang on to the thought of "how it should be", remember the hurts or we can let them go.

Now comes the 4<sup>th</sup> Noble Truth, the way to end our frustrations and for Buddhism that is the 8 Fold Path. It is that life is fundamentally **Good**. In Mini-Golf too, we have to follow a path, we can't skip around the course to any hole at all. We also have to follow the path of each individual hole. If the hole curves or goes around an obstacle, we have to pay attention to the layout of the hole and play each one differently. Can you imagine hitting every ball in a perfectly straight line every time, even though all of the layouts are not straight? Sounds pretty crazy to me. Following a path makes sense, in Mini-Golf and in life. If we didn't have a path to follow, where would we end up? Probably going in circles.

As I thought more about the Dharma, Mini-Golf and life, my thoughts kept coming back to the ideas of change and adaptation. The Mini-Golf courses of today are not like the ones I played on as a child. Today's courses are not bad, they are just different. Each Mini-Golf course is different (change) and all of the holes are different (change) and as we play Mini-Golf we can change how we play each hole or play them all the same. Which way do you think would work the best? Obviously, if we play them all the same, it won't go well for us. Life works that way too. Every day is different, every situation is different and we need to constantly adapt to the

change. Life is not a predictable straight line, no matter what we may think. Even the Mini-Golf course we are going to today is new and not at all like the course we have played before. We are surrounded by change.

Does everything change? The short answer is Yes. Maybe . . . . . the core of who we are or the core of our beliefs are a constant? Actually, the core is the same but the packaging of those beliefs are fluid and changing too. Even President Obama, in his inaugural speech 4 years ago said, "Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends, these things are old. These things are true." When we talk about change, we have to address change within our churches, the need to translate what we know and believe as Buddhists to the current world and the current society. Does that mean the core of Buddhism and Jodo Shinshu need to change? I do not believe so. The core is the same; the underlying beliefs are still unchanged. Do we need to make it relevant to today's generation? Without a doubt, we must. As the listeners change, we, too, must change. Changing the music and the chanting to more English is a beginning; expanding and changing to be inclusive of everyone in the larger community regardless of their ethnic background is equally important and does not mean the core of beliefs are changed. The interior, the core of Buddhism and Jodo Shinshu, the basic concepts of compassion and gratitude, does not change but the outside must. If we stand still, refusing to change, while the world around us changes, we will be left behind. The rock in the stream that refuses to move on will be worn away until nothing is left. If we can float with the river of change, we can stay strong and vibrant and be around for many more generations. Remember, change does not mean "bad" it simply means different. The world is constantly evolving and we can, we must evolve, to stay relevant and continue to have joy in our lives.