

New Year's Greeting

Rev. Takahashi

At the beginning of 2016, I would like to express my greetings for the New Year. Thanks to you, your help and support, Lihue Hongwanji was able to hold various services and activities in 2015. Let me take this opportunity to extend my deep gratitude to all of you. I humbly ask you to continue supporting Lihue Hongwanji this year. Every year, Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii has a slogan. Our slogan for this year is "Embrace Change: New Vision (Create Engagement)." By reflecting on this slogan, we would have different inspirations. When I heard it, I remembered a saying that would teach us the proper way of listening to the Buddha Dharma. There is a saying, "The summer cicada has no knowledge of spring or autumn. How could that insect know that it is summertime." This phrase originates from Chuang-tzu who was philosopher in ancient China and is sometimes used in Buddhist scriptures including Shinran Shonin's writing. Cicadas are insects that are not to be seen in Hawaii. They spend most of their lives underground and live only a few weeks in summer after they come out of the ground. The saying means that the cicadas cannot realize that they live in summer because they don't have knowledge of other seasons.

In Jodo Shin Buddhism, we always learn that it is essential for us to entrust our heart to Amida Buddha's working and to walk the path of life reciting Namo Amida Butsu. Then, at the end of life, we will be born in the Pure Land and become a Buddha. However, I often receive some questions as follows, "Sensei, it's hard to understand about Amida Buddha and Pure Land because we cannot see them." or "It's hard to understand why we can become a Buddha solely by entrusting our heart to Amida's working." Have you ever had this kind of questions? In such a case, the phrase about the summer cicada would help us in understanding the teachings. Even if the cicadas hear about spring and autumn, they probably can't understand because other seasons are beyond their perceptions. However, needless to say, there are various seasons.

Likewise, even if we hear about Amida Buddha and Pure Land, it would be hard for us to understand because we hear about the world of enlightenment which is beyond our perception. It is as if the cicadas attempt to learn other seasons. However, Sakyamuni Buddha who became aware of the world of enlightenment teaches us that Amida Buddha and Pure Land exist. Shinran Shonin revealed that everyone can follow this teaching. Therefore, it is important for us to rely on not our limited perceptions but their guidance to learn the teachings. Accordingly, the New Vision or Buddha's Vision will be provided for our lives and bring joy, gratitude and peace of mind. Shinran Shonin said: My eyes being hindered by blind passions, I cannot perceive the light that grasps me; Yet the great compassion, without tiring, illumines me always. (Hymns of the Pure Land Masters: Collected Works of Shinran, p. 385)

The slogan "Embrace Change: New Vision (Create Engagement)" would remind us of the significance of listening to the teachings. Let us continue living our daily lives with the Nembutsu teachings this year.

Namo Amida Butsu.