

## Now or Never

Rev. Takahashi, February 2016

Once I read an interesting article that reminded me of an important thing about Buddhism. The article was about the New Year's Resolution. According to the article, in United States, many people make a New Year's resolution for the New Year, to change some habits. For example, some people want to exercise more, lose weight, stop smoking or drinking, save money and so on. However, the article also said that a third of our resolutions are discarded by the end of January. Four out of five people simply give their resolutions up. In addition, some people make same resolutions every year, because they always give up a few months after the New Year.

One of the biggest reasons why they give up the resolution is that they tend to postpone their good intentions. They think, "Oh, I'm busy this week, so I will start next week." or "I can start next month." Then the year is up before they accomplish their goal.

This article reminded me of the proper attitude for listening to the teaching of Buddhism. Rennyō Shōnin said, "In the Buddhist teachings, there can be no thought of tomorrow. Hurry up! Hurry up! when it comes to the Buddha Dharma." He also said, "Hear the Buddha-Dharma well when young. When you grow old, you will find walking difficult and also get sleepy when hearing the Dharma. Therefore, hear the Buddha Dharma well when young."

He kept telling people that we must listen to the teaching now and it shouldn't be postponed. Some people think that Buddhism is for the future or the time after this life. However that is a misunderstanding. Buddhism teaches us how to live in the present moment.

Regarding this guidance, I would like to share one story that I once heard. This is the episode of a Japanese person who sincerely followed the Nembutsu teaching. He passed away at the age of 68 because of illness. A couple of months before he passed away, he had a chance to get together with his family and relatives. At that time, he spoke as follows. "Thank you for coming today. I'm so happy to see you. As you know, I have a terminal illness. I think I will die soon. I'm not sure how my life ends. I may be suffering. I may not be able to speak. However, please don't worry about me because Amida Buddha always embraces me. I will be born into the Pure Land and become a Buddha. There is nothing to worry about. I will be waiting to see you in the Pure Land. I'm glad to have a chance to express my appreciation today."

When I heard this episode, I was really impressed. He had a sickness. He realized he will die soon. However, even in such a situation, he lived his life with full of gratitude. He truly accepted the reality of this world and entrusted his life to Amida Buddha's working. If he didn't listen to the teaching of Nembutsu, he wouldn't have had this kind of peaceful mind. Rennyō Shōnin said, "Hurry up, hurry up", because it brings us the firm strength to our transient life. Shinran Shōnin said: Of those who encounter the power of the Primal Vow, not one passes by in vain, they are filled with the treasure

of ocean of virtues; The defiled waters of their blind passions not separated from it.  
("Hymns of the Pure Land, Collected Works of Shinran, p.364")

We would have the habit of postponing important things somehow. However, if we keep postponing, we never put them into action. The article about New Year's resolution made me remember the important thing. Fortunately we have already encountered the teaching of Nembutsu. Let us keep remembering the words of our masters, listen to the teaching of Nembutsu and live each day to the fullest.

Namo Amida Butsu.