

We Have an Umbrella

Rev. Takahashi, April 2016

The other day, I talked with someone about the recent weather on Kauai. It was cold in the mornings and evenings and very windy. I guess we often talk about the weather in our conversation. When I talk about the weather, I'm sometimes reminded of one story relating to the teaching of Buddhism.

In the history of Japanese Buddhism, there are famous Nembutsu followers called Myokonin, people who really rejoice in the Nembutsu teaching. They were not ministers. Also it's not that they studied the Jodo Shinshu teaching so much. However, they always listened to the Dharma and expressed their feelings in some notes. Their simple words, poems and episodes are really interesting. It would make us aware of some important things and inspire us. I would like to share two episodes of Genza who is a famous Myokonin.

The first episode occurred on a summer day. Genza worked outside and was caught in a shower. Since he didn't have an umbrella, he was drenched with rain. He stopped working and left for home. On his way home, he encountered a minister who saw Genza drenched with rain. He said to Genza, "Oh, Genza, you got very wet, didn't you?" Genza replied, "Yes, thank you very much. How grateful I am that my nose is pointing downward." At first, this conversation might sound strange. However, if our nose points upward, what is going to happen? The rain would fall into our noses, making us choke and suffer. Genza appreciated what he could avoid such a situation, even though he was very wet. He remembered the value of his nose pointing downward.

Another episode of Genza took place on another hot summer day. Since that day was too hot, somebody complained to Genza that it was too hot. Then he replied, "If outside is too hot, we have clothes to protect us from heat and sunshine. In case it rains, we have an umbrella. Oyasama always makes everything all right. How can we complain?" He said like this.

Oyasama literally means our parent, but this word also refers to Amida Buddha. Genza realized that Amida Buddha always supports us, making us aware how every situation can be seen as appropriate, even if we encounter some event that we feel is unfavorable. Therefore, Genza was delighted that his nose was pointing downward, and that his clothes and umbrella always provided protection. Thus Genza always felt Amida Buddha's compassion which embraces our lives, and was always grateful for everything during his life.

This story reminds me of what I am provided with. Actually, thanks to the rain, there are beautiful greenery and plentiful water. However, it is hard to remember these facts every time. Even if I understand that I should appreciate it, and even if I learn from the stories of Genza, I tend to wish sometimes for the rain to stop and for the weather to be fine.

Therefore it would be significant to continue listening to the teaching and to live our daily lives saying Namo Amida Butsu. It would enable us to reflect on ourselves and causes us to see things differently. Shinran Shonin said: Those who, hearing Amida

Buddha's Name, rejoice in it with reverence and praise, receive its treasure of virtues;
The great benefit acquired with one utterance is supreme.

(Hymns of the Pure Land: Collected Works of Shinran, p. 332)

The stories of Genza made me think that the unstable weather would remind us of some important things. Even if we forget an umbrella on a rainy day, let us not forget "Namo Amida Butsu".