

New Year's Greeting  
By Reverend Kazunori Takahashi

At the beginning of 2015, I would like to express my greetings for the New Year. Last year, I experienced a big change when I was assigned to Lihue Hongwanji. Though I moved from Kapaa, the neighboring town of Lihue, my life was totally changed. I needed to get accustomed to living in the new place. However, thanks to you, your advice and generous support, I got settled here. Let me take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to all of you. I am looking forward to sharing the Nembutsu teaching and wonderful time with you this year.

When I first experienced the New Year in Hawaii seven years ago, I was surprised, because I saw some Japanese traditional customs of the New Year that I had experienced in Japan, such as Mochi making, hitting the temple bell at the New Year's Eve, eating *Soba* and *Ozoni*, etc. In addition, I found another common feature of the New Year. I heard that many people make a New Year's resolution as we face the New Year. Did you make any New Year's resolution? In my case, I often think that "I try to do more exercise this year" or "I try to cook as much as possible." However, somehow it's not easy for me to keep doing such things. I must make a resolution with strong determination.

Thinking about the New Year's resolution, I always remember one thing. Amida Buddha made his firm resolution in the form of the 48 vows when he was Dharmakara Bodhisattva. He made the resolution to save all beings and has already accomplished it and become Amida Buddha.

In our lives, we encounter different kind of events. We would feel happy and joy through pleasant occasions. On the other hand, we would feel sad or hard through difficult occasions. I guess that some of you had hardships like having some illness or parting from your loved one during the last year. Amida Buddha thinks that each of us is precious existence. He cannot help but abandon all beings, so he established the vows and accomplished it. If we are aware of such Amida Buddha's wish and working, we would learn that we have already been provided ways of overcoming our hardships that we would encounter in our lives. In Jodo Shin Buddhism, we firmly walk the path of our lives entrusting our heart to Amida Buddha and reciting *Namo Amida Butsu*.

Shinran Shonin said: **When we reflect on the establishment of the Vow, we find that the Tathagata, without abandoning sentient beings in pain and affliction, has taken the directing of virtue to them as foremost, thus fulfilling the mind of great compassion.**

(Hymns of the Dharma-Ages: Collected Works of Shinran, p.408)

He also emphasized that we must listen to the origin of his resolution as follows: **The word *hear* in the passage from the Larger Sutra means that sentient beings, having heard how the Buddha's Vow arose—its origin and fulfillment—are altogether free of doubt. This is to hear.**

(The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization III: Collected Works of Shinran, p.112)

2015 just started. Now may be a good time to think about some New Year's resolution. At the same time, let us continue to enjoy listening to the Amida Buddha's resolution with deep gratitude. The word of "Amida's primal vow" is translated "Hongwan" in Japanese. Let us continue having the wonderful time at Lihue Hongwanji this year. *Namo Amida Butsu*.