

Harmony
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Every year, Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii has a slogan. Our slogan for this year is “Embrace Change: Harmony (Accept Differences).” Thinking about the significance of harmony, I always remember a story.

In Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, we always hear about the Pure Land. Some Buddhist scriptures describe what kind of place the Pure Land is. Some sutras say that the Pure Land is a really beautiful place. There are some beautiful birds of various colors, such as white swans, peacocks, parrots and so on that always make beautiful sounds. The *gumyocho* (two-headed bird) is one of them, always emphasizing the importance of peace and harmony in the Pure Land.

The *gumyocho* is a little strange. It has one body and two heads which can think separate thoughts. There is a reason why this bird is in the Pure Land. In some place, there was a *gumyocho* with two heads, like Head A and Head B. Each head uttered a beautiful voice, so the bird became very popular. However, both heads started arguing. Head A always thought, “We are praised because my voice is beautiful. My voice is more beautiful than that of Head B.” Head B had same thoughts. “My voice is the best. If Head A were not around, only I could be praised.” Thus, each of them thought, “I am better than the other head”, and they hated each other.

One day, Head A tried to kill Head B by mixing a poison into some grass. The plan worked well and Head B ate the grass. Then Head B started to suffer. However just after that, Head A also started to suffer, because there are two heads, but their body is one! Head A suddenly realized that he was also suffering. Finally, Head A and Head B or this *gumyocho* foolishly died. After this incident, other birds realized that, “If I thought about only myself, I cannot live in peace. It is important to think about others. We must live together in harmony and understanding and support each other.” Since then, the *gumyochos* have been emphasizing the importance of peace and harmony in the Pure Land.

This story teaches us a really important thing. We may think that each life in this world is separated like the heads of the *gumyocho*. However, the Buddha teaches us that we are all interconnected like the life of the *gumyocho*. For example, without food, plants, sun, rain, rivers, oceans, and other people, we cannot live. It is obvious that each life supports each other although they look separated.

In this world, there are many different people, ideas, cultures, countries, religions, and so on. Today, some of them sadly conflict because of difference or lack of understanding. Even among a small group, family or community, it would happen with the same reason. These situations are similar to the story of the *gumyocho*.

Shinran Shonin said that different sounds are harmonious in the Pure Land as follows: **Pure winds blow in the jewel-trees, producing the five tones of the scale. As those sounds are harmonious and spontaneous, pay homage to Amida, the one imbued with purity.**

(Hymns of the Pure Land, *Collected Works of Shinran*, p.335)

The story of the *gumyocho* teaches us that it is important for us to accept differences and to live peacefully with others. When we live remembering this guidance, there would be beautiful harmony like the sound of the Pure Land. Namo Amida Butsu.