

Guidance for Life / Joy in Our Lives

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A few weeks ago we had the privilege of hearing Rev. Jay Okamoto speak at our Hoonko Service. I liked his thoughts, his analogy, about waking up from dreaming, waking up to our lives. His story, remember, was that if someone is having a bad dream, or snoring loudly, in the bed next to you then you reach over to gently shake them, telling them “Wake up!” This is an analogy for listening to the dharma and waking up to the truth of our lives, to be more aware and more mindful of our lives.

I like the analogy . . . we do need to wake up and become more aware and mindful of our lives and the people around us. Then I thought of the next step after waking up. The question I had was “After we wake up, then what?” If we were being awakened from sleep, from a dream, the question would be “What happens next?” Do we roll over and stay in bed? Do we get up and wander around aimlessly? Do we stay in bed and do nothing? Do we wake up and get on with our lives? If we choose to wake up and get on with our lives, then the next question becomes, “Where do we go and what do we do?” We need direction for our lives. When we get up in the morning, we need to know where to go and what to do. We need structure in our lives. We use calendars and planners so we know what to do and where to go. What if you had no planner, no calendar? Can you imagine how difficult life would be? Confusing. Stressful. Life might seem aimless. We might be like the Road Runner and run off in any and all directions as fast as possible, but not knowing where we will end up. Not the best use of our time.

There is always guidance all around us. We cannot live without it. Think of all the things in our lives that give us guidance: menus in restaurants, price tags, lines in a parking lot, etc. Sometimes we follow the guidance and sometimes we do not. Guidance is helpful but it is not a rule and we are not punished if we ignore guidance. Things may be more difficult but we are not punished. Can you imagine being in a foreign country and trying to find a restaurant when you can't read the language? What guidance can you use to help yourself? Or trying to order food without pictures? We rely on guidance constantly in our daily lives.

So you may be asking yourself, “What does all this have to do with Buddhism?” Good question. As I thought about Rev. Okamoto's story about waking up to life, I realized that we do need to wake up to our lives and live our lives. He said “Share the Joy-people see how you live.” But how do we do that? How do we live our lives? How do we share the joy? For me, and I think for many lay people, guidance for our lives means we rely on those wonderful concepts wrapped up in the Golden Chain, the Promise and the concepts of Interdependence, Impermanence, Compassion, Kindness and Gratitude. We know that these concepts are guidance, they help us to remember what is important. They are not our goal, they are not what we have to strive to achieve. We don't repeat the “Golden Chain” to earn “dharma points” so we can get to the Pure Land, but it does show us how we can live our lives, live in peace with each other and live with greater happiness. Even if we stumble and make mistakes, and we

will do that on a daily basis, we are still ok. We always have opportunities to try again and again. Buddhism truly is about joy, about sharing our joy.

If we do follow the advice of the Buddha and the guidance he left for the world, then we can remember to think and say beautiful words and do thoughtful deeds. We know that Shinran gave us the easy practice, Difficult practice is not necessary, say the Nembutsu with sincerity. We don't have to be locked away as a monk to practice. We can live in this world and still live on the Buddhist Path, Shinran gave us that.

The Impermanence of life is with us always. We should never take life for granted. I like the following words as I think they reflect the thoughts of Impermanence:

Never let the sadness of your past or the worries of your future
destroy the happiness of the present.

With Impermanence in mind, I want to share something that was sent to me a few years ago by Carolyn Uchiyama, the Chair of the Commission on Buddhist Education. It is call WoW . . . have WoWsome days. It is about appreciating the small stuff in our lives. It is about noticing the present: The beauty of a sunrise or sunset; Laugh out loud moments; Sharing smiles; Thoughtful words shared; Unexpected presents; Compliments; Warm greetings; Random acts of kindness

Because I feel that music is important to our lives and science has proven that it aides memory and retention because it affects so many areas of the brain at one time, I want to share a song that, for me, speaks to what Shinran has said to us. We are told "come as you are, you are ok just as you are." The message in the video is "Don't worry about a thing. Every little thing's gonna be alright." (music from Bob Marley)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaGUr6wzyT8>

Let me finish with a quote from Renny Shonin:

"If one walks looking far ahead and pays no attention to the ground beneath his eyes, he will stumble. If one gazes critically upon others and forgets to look into himself, he will bring tragedy upon himself."