

84,000 Thoughts - Chocolate Buddhas

By: Rev. Earl Ikeda

A recent article described a confectionary shop in NYC that sells chocolate in the forms of religious figures. There you can find figures and symbols of Jesus, Moses, the elephant Hindu god Ganesh, and the Buddha, all in chocolate. Although the chocolate items have been sold for several years, only recently has there been a reaction from religious groups. The article reported that leaders of some religions found the chocolate figurines disrespectful, while other leaders didn't see them as offensive or harmful.

Someone asked me how I felt about the chocolate pieces, and it brought back a memory of something that happened many years ago that influenced my thinking.

I was in Japan attending Ryukoku University, which was founded on the principles of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. I had the privilege of living at Kaikyoshi Kenkyusho, the school for Japanese ministers who were going abroad to propagate the dharma as kaikyoshi, or overseas ministers. It was there that I became awed and deeply inspired by the depth of the Teachings of the Buddha and our sect's founder Shinran Shonin. Living there gave us all the opportunity to share and learn about each other's lifestyles and cultures.

On one occasion another minister took out his wallet and showed me a picture of his girlfriend, and also a picture holder containing the six characters of Na-mo-a-mi-da-butsu. I noticed that the tri-fold had the words hoben hosshin stamped on it, which literally means "expressing the true dharma-body (of the Bud-

dha) through expedient or skillful means." I had never seen that expression before, so I asked him what the writing symbolized. He said it represented the essence of the truth of Amida Buddha. He further explained that this stamp of authenticity could only be issued by our Mother Temple, Honzan, and therefore this picture was true and real because it was made in accordance with the doctrine and practices of the Hongwanji.

I asked him if the picture truly represented Amida Buddha in every way, and he responded with a definite "yes." But it was my understanding that the concept of Amida Buddha, as expressed in the words Namo Amida Butsu, cannot truly be understood, because it represents the unlimited depth of truth and reality. So I asked him, how can a piece of paper truly represent all that Amida Buddha represents?

He was unable to convince me that the tri-fold truly represented the dharma-body of the Buddha. To me, it was just a piece of paper attempting to express an inconceivable concept. Our conversation went back and forth and became heated. Finally, he challenged me by putting the tri-fold on the floor and daring me to step on it. I paused. I couldn't do it! He told me that my inability to step on it proved I accepted the essence and meaning of the tri-fold. But I told him that the reason I couldn't step on it was because I knew it was very important to him. I felt I had no right to destroy or distort another person's belief in trying to understand the essence of Buddha.

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Sangha News and Events

February and Future Events

February 7, 2016

- 9:00 AM: Sangha cleans the Hondo
- 9:30 AM: Dharma School cleans the Tsuji Center
- 10:00 AM: Buddhism 101 (Tsuji Center)
- 11:00 AM: Shotsuki Service (Temple)
- 12:00 PM: Open Dharma discussion (Temple)

February 14, 2016: Tet Observance

- (No Dharma School- Presidents' Day)
- 8:20 AM: Vietnamese Buddhist Pilgrimage (Temple)
- 9:00 AM: Religious Committee meeting
- 10:00 AM: Buddhism 101 (Tsuji Center)
- 11:00 AM: Service (Temple)
- 12:00 PM: Open Dharma discussion (Temple)
- 12:30 PM: Vietnamese Luncheon fund-raiser, suggested donation \$10

February 21, 2016

- 10:00 AM: Buddhism 101 (Tsuji Center)
- 10:00 AM, Dharma School Classes (Tsuji Center)
- 11:00 AM: Joint Ho-Onko Service with Reverend Ikeda (Temple)
- 12:30 PM: Buddhism Study Group with Professor Ann Stegner
- 12:30 PM: Sangha Pot Luck Luncheon (Sangha Hall)

Saturday February 27

- 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM: Ekoji Winter Seminar with Brian Nagata
- 5:00 PM: Family Night for Dharma School

February 28, 2016

- (No Dharma School...after Family Night)
- 10:00 AM: Buddhism 101 (Tsuji Center)
- 11:00 AM: Nirvana Day Service with Brian Na-

gata (Temple)

- 12:00 PM: Open Dharma discussion (Temple)
- 12:30 PM: Sangha Pot Luck Luncheon (Sangha Hall)

Buddhism Study Group

This group is a monthly Buddhism Study Group session. It's a Brown bag lunch meeting to deepen our understanding of the Dharma through reading and discussion. The sessions will be led by Dr. Ann Stegner, world religions professor at NOVA, but it is more the Sangha taking refuge in the Sangha and helping each other. The group meets regularly on the third Sunday of each month.

Sangha Member News

Congratulations to Lauren (daughter of Norman and Gail Kondo) and George Rabil on the birth of their daughter, Emilia Lynn Rabil on January 17, 2016. Emi was 6 lbs, 9 oz. and 21 inches long at birth. Sangha Congratulations to the parents and grandparents, and welcome to the world, Emi!

The Sangha of the Ekoji Buddhist Temple offers its deepest sympathies to the family of Mrs. Mariko Tamura Horita who passed away on January 13, 2016. With the support of Mrs. Horita, husband Tak participated in the leadership of Ekoji as a member of the governing Board and then as President during the transition of the temple from Old Keene Mill Road to its present location in Fairfax Station. The Sangha owes its gratitude to both Tak and Mariko Horita for their hard work and leadership on behalf of the Temple. We can only say, Namō Amida Butsu.

Please submit news such as special honors or awards, weddings, births, graduations, etc., to Michael Galvin so we can share with the Sangha.

84,000 Thoughts

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We ended our conversation then, but in the days to come we talked about the issue from time to time. He eventually served in Hawaii for several years, and we became close friends. He later returned to Japan, but we are still the best of friends and periodically exchange doctrinal points of view.

I still see the tri-fold as a piece of paper, and the chocolate figurines simply as shaped pieces of chocolate. But are the chocolate images of Buddha and other religious images disrespectful, or are they okay? What about caps and T-shirts, key chains, photos, and other items with the words Namō amida Butsu or references

to other religious beliefs? I won't and can't say they are or are not correct or incorrect. But perhaps our study of the dharma helps us to see things as they really are, and to see through illusions that cloud our vision. Until we attain enlightenment, and become buddhas ourselves, we cannot be sure. The Buddha did mention in his teachings that everything is acceptable in its own way and that it is the mind that makes judgment. The best we can do is to listen to our hearts to determine our feelings, and to be mindful of the hearts and feelings of others. Namō Amida Butsu

BCA Voices: Star Wars Revenge of the Sith

By Rev. John Iwohara

The ministers of the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) have important lessons to share with us. Through this column, we would like to share many of those lessons with the readers of the Kalavinka. The following article is by Reverend John Iwohara, which appeared in the December 2015 newsletter of the Gardena Buddhist Church, Megumi.

“You were supposed to be the chosen one!” were the final words of Obi Wan Kenobi as he left Anakin Skywalker, Darth Vader, to die on the molten world of Mustafar. This climax to the film occurs with the transformation of the Jedi Knight (the good guys) Anakin Skywalker into the Sith (the bad guys) Darth Vader. Although there were external circumstances that aided in this transformation into the dark side of the Sith, the choices made by Anakin were all his to make. At each turn we were allowed to see the inner struggle Anakin had in making the choices that he made, choices that all could have been made differently. The inner struggle that Anakin battled with, however, existed only because Anakin knew that he had choices, and despite knowing this still made choices that could only lead to the dark side.

In the final scene, for example Obi Wan and Anakin were in the middle of a life and death light saber (sword) fight while floating on a river of molten lava. During this struggle, Obi Wan was able to get off the floating platform the two were struggling on and get onto dry land before Anakin was able to. During the ensuing face off, Obi Wan warns his ward not to continue with the struggle because he has the higher ground and an insurmountable advantage. Despite this direct warning from his teacher, Anakin continues the fight with dire consequences to himself. As stated earlier, at the conclusion of this struggle Anakin was left to die on the molten world without his arms or his legs. Although his evil mentor, Darth Sidious, would later save his physical life, Anakin Skywalker could not escape the hell he himself created that would be lived as the life of Darth Vader. In becoming Darth Vader, we are led to see that Anakin was blind to his own passions and always ready to blame others or circumstances. He never considered his own responsibility for the situation he was in.

Each and every one of us creates his or her own

world, and although we would probably not like to identify ourselves with Darth Vader, his is probably the character that Shinran Shonin would most closely identify himself with. For example, in the Chapter on Faith in his *Kyogyoshinsho*, Shinran Shonin quotes the following passage:

“One is to believe deeply and decidedly that you are a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from innumerable kalpas in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation.” (Collected Works of Shinran, p. 85).

Again in the *Tannisho*, Shinran Shonin is quoted as having said: *“but I am incapable of any other practice, so hell is decidedly my abode whatever I do.” (Collected Works of Shinran, p. 662)* Although Darth Vader is eventually saved by the faith his son, Luke Skywalker, has in him, how did Shinran Shonin live his life to be revered as a Shonin and not feared or abhorred like Darth Vader? For example, his idea that his life was fit for hell is in marked contrast to a fundamental Mahayana Buddhist concept of “All Sentient Beings Have Buddha Nature.” Instead of emphasizing this, Shinran Shonin took a more negative view of human life. How could this be popular? In looking at our own lives, however, how often do we think of this Buddha Nature of ours? Do we ever try to nurture it? Instead, do we tend not to fall short of our potential and hear instead a remorseful voice shouting, “You were supposed to be the chosen one”? This was, I believe, the voice that Shinran Shonin heard. What are we to do?

We, like Anakin Skywalker, are blind to our passions partially because of our fear. It is the fear of not being accepted, the fear of not being appreciated, the fear of not living to one’s potential, and the fear of failure. Shinran Shonin, too, like myself, like many, had these fears. What did Shinran Shonin do? This doubt that Shinran Shonin felt in his own heart was transcended by the heart of Compassion, the heart of the Buddha. It is the heart of the Buddha that says, “I will not take Enlightenment, unless all are able to be born in my land.” It is hearing this promise of the Bud-

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Winter Seminar - Hey, WHY do they do THAT?

This month, Ekoji has a great winter seminar planned. Have you ever wondered why in Jodo Shinshu we do the things we do?

Well, join us on February 27th to hear Reverend Brian Nagata, BCA minister, for this exciting presentation. This seminar is an opportunity for those of us new to Shin Buddhism to hear about our history, practice and religion.

In the words of Reverend Nagata:

“Some of the worship practices or procedures at Ekoji may seem very Judeo-Christian while other parts of our practice/worship may seem very alien to an American. There are also elements of Japanese culture involved in temple services and activities, which may not necessarily be Buddhist in origin or may not be practiced the same by other Buddhist paths.”

Some topics to be covered are:

- History of Ekoji Buddhist Temple and the Buddhist Churches of America
- History of the Jodo Shinshu Tradition
- Explanation of the Hondo, Gejin (seating area) and Naijin (altar space) as a traditional Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji temple
- Service/temple practice and etiquette as a Shin Buddhist
- Significance of a Buddhist Name
- Explanation about the practice of no-practice of Shin Buddhism
- Types of Shin Buddhist Services and observances
- Explanation of common Japanese terms you will hear
- Meaning of the Minister’s robes
- Explanation of the home altar (obutsudan) and ideas for creating your own home altar

Whether you are new to Buddhism or a life-long Shin Buddhist, you are welcome.

The cost is \$10.00 registration for non-Ekoji members, but the seminar is Free for Members! There is a \$5.00 Donation requested for lunch.

For more information, please contact: Ed Sams at caz7210@gmail.com, or Jane Blechman at jane.ekoji@gmail.com.

Winter Seminar by Rev. Brian Nagata



February 27, 2016

10:00 am to 3:00 pm

Free for Ekoji Members
\$10.00 Registration for non-Ekoji members
\$5.00 Donation for Lunch

For more information, please contact:
Ed Sams at caz7210@gmail.com, or
Jane Blechman at jane.ekoji@gmail.com



Ekoji President's Message

By: Michael Galvin

I would love to tell you that our quest for a resident minister, with the compassionate assistance of the BCA and our supporters at BDK, is gaining some traction. And so we will. There has been an individual identified as someone who would enjoy having us as much as we having him, but the devil is in the details, and for the moment the details separate our anticipation from confidence. There is a chance that we will have a new resident minister by April, and perhaps an equal chance that we will not. Such is the coin toss that drives our binary samsara: on-off, maybe-for sure, ok-faggetaboutit, one-not one. I hope to celebrate our arrival on a new threshold of hope and potential soon, and cannot help but remain vigilant that whatever our proximal path, we will need to be well-prepared. We need to fix up the homestead and somehow find more money to buy a new tractor. The sangha will be going to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha... then back to the Sangha because the first two don't use money. Please put your entrepreneurial hats on and recognize each day the priceless gift that is Ekoji and our being together in the Dharma because of our temple. And then think, how can I help? Then answer yourself with a practical idea...or maybe a crazy one, and share that.

Now I'll shift to some learning that has been occurring as a result of my participation in the last phase of the Jodu Shinshu Correspondence Course. As the final segment of the course draws to a close, it is fitting that both the sixth and seventh masters, Genshin and Honen, together seem to weave a tapestry that is the narrative of the Nembutsu path in its most austere and simple form. In this simplicity, as in the Nembutsu, a universe of meaning and intention works in the background. A phenomenon that is like a singularity that could become all manifold universes in an instant out of time...restrained, preserved in its simplicity and its maximum potential at the same time. The moment before a big bang is an inhalation, and the last two masters before Shinran Shonin invite us to just be with this breath, present with the sense of the universe coming involuntarily into our lungs. When we breathe...because our heart beats and our blood flows and the atmosphere of our environment is at about fifteen pounds per square inch, a gradient is formed in which, while our blood flows, we are more so being breathed than breathing. That is a sense of other power that meets where our tissues meet the world we

deem not us, the breath that moves into our lungs and crosses the interface between the other and us.

And here in this idea I cannot help but reflect on yet another paradox in my understanding of the world and the teachings of the Buddha and the Shin masters: it is clear that the author of my recent class reading recognizes that Genshin, as he encourages the recitation of the Nembutsu as determinative of the essential practice within the auxiliary practices, he is recommending, to some, perhaps the real fools like myself, that on our own effort we can be born in the Pure Land, that the Nembutsu of self-power is a path. And perhaps it is...for those of us who find it inconceivable that we might already be settled, that despite our anxious twitching and writhing we are already held in the salvific power of the 18th vow, because as we know, even the vilest of us is promised enlightenment. Not only is it promised but it is already an inch from our nose awaiting our simple awakening.

And so Genshin explains that we are all destined to be born in the Pure Land (or are already there), and that it shows up somewhat differently to us based on how we got there. The majority of ourselves who, though the stubborn workings of our ego and insistence that we can control everything within our grasp, cannot help but put ourselves into the practice of the Nembutsu. Just the idea of "practice" means that our focus, our intention, our actions, no matter how feverish and squirrely they may be, are the causes and conditions of our enlightenment. So we arrive in the Pure Land seeing the new world as "transformed", something much like the saha world yet changed to suit our new perspective, our tiny slice of shinjin awareness, where we continue to be deluded by thoughts that we have "made" a world. Lucky we are to be in the Pure Land, unfortunate that our shinjin is shallow, so our version of the pure land is...our version, tainted and painted by our own expectations, that have through countless turns of the wheel been the source of our suffering. We get to keep the indolence and pride, and still we are saved.

Those few who are able to surrender, to truly take refuge, to truly entrust all that we believe to be self to the Ocean of the Nembutsu of Other Power, these few are born in the fulfilled lands, the portion of the Pure Land that neither needs our eyes to be seen nor is subject to our whitewashing, to our narrative, to the

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President's Message

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land is the land in, when and where the pent up potential of the single inhalation has long been expressed in its fullness. The singularity is at the same moment the tiny speck of inconceivable potential and all that has blossomed, at once the seed and the fruit, without duality. So as I breathe my hope is that increasingly my recitation of the Nembutsu becomes my breath, so

that in my very experience of the wonders of the moment and the gift of life is all gratitude, and the Nembutsu on my lips is Amida calling me home, in from the cold, back to where I have always been, wrapped in the arms of immeasurable and infinite compassion, light and life. Namo Amida Butsu

BCA Voices: Star Wars

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dha that allowed Shinran Shonin to say:

"Wholly sincere, indeed, are the words of the truth that one is grasped, never to be abandoned, the right dharma all-surpassing and wondrous! Hear and reflect, and let there be no wavering or apprehension." (Collected Works of Shinran. p.4)

Through these words, we too can discover a world

that transcends fear. Instead of fear we anticipate a world of beauty, a world of Enlightenment, a Pure Land shared with a Buddha. In that anticipation, Shinran Shonin shows us a world of joy, a world of sharing, and the world of appreciation: Shinran Shonin has showed us the world of the Nembutsu, a life we can live and share, here and now. Namo Amida Butsu

Buddhist and Jodo Shinshu Symbols - February Services

NIRVANA DAY OR NEHAN-E Although Sakya-muni Buddha had already attained liberation under the Bodhi tree long before his death, this is the day he passed into complete Nirvana, leaving his earthly form behind. Jodo Shinshu followers revere Sakya-muni Buddha because he is the manifestation of Amida Buddha on this earth, so this is an opportunity to show gratitude for the noble teachings that were communicated to humanity through him. (*Jodo Shinshu: A Guide, Hongwanji, p. 131*)

Buddha Entrance to Nirvana. At the end of the Forty-fifth Rainy Season Retreat at Beluva near Vaisali, the Buddha set off on his missionary travels again. With a serene face he looked at Vaisali and said as if to himself, "This will be my last look at Vaisali. I shall probably not come here again." His words startled the disciples. The Buddha said, "This body has become like a worn out wheel now at the age of eighty. In three months I shall be parting from you. You must be diligent in working out your salvation from this world of suffering of the cycle of birth and death."

As the Buddha and his disciples continued the journey, the disciples asked many questions and received illumination from the Buddha. The record of this trip makes up the Nirvana Sutra.

On his way to Kusinagara the Buddha rested in a small village called Pava. There a blacksmith named Cunda, rejoicing that the Buddha had come, respectfully invited him to a meal. This was the last time the Buddha partook of a meal.

When the Buddha arrived at a sala grove near Ajitavati, he said, "Ananda, please prepare a couch with its head to the north in the shade of the twin sala trees over there. There I will enter Nirvana. Therefore, those who have doubts and misgivings about the Dharma should inquire freely now."

Ananda led the Buddha to the couch between the twin sala trees and asked, "World-honored one, who shall teach us after you are gone?"

The Buddha replied solemnly, "Depend not on a teacher but look to the Dharma. The Dharma I have taught and the silas (precepts) I have set are your Great Teacher." Then as the full moon of February 15th began to wane, the Buddha said, "O Disciples, if none of you have any questions to ask, may there be peace and quiet. The time to go where there is freedom and calm has come for me." With these last words the Buddha quietly closed his eyes. (*Ji Shin Kyo Nin Shin, Dharma School Teachers Guide, Buddhist Churches of America, p. 267.*)

Ekoji Dana List - November 2015

*Aihua Zhou
Ajit and Samantha Silva
Alexis Yamashita
Andrew Barden
Ann and John Ishikawa
Anthony and Kristy Capizzi
Arlene and Wayne Minami
Arlene Mayeda
Art Politano
Bert and Nancy Motonaga
Bob Shimokaji
Bud Uyeda
Clifford Long
Curtis Rothrock
Dale Shirasago
Danielle Silas
Dod Dodson
Donald and Tomoko Smith
Edward Sams
Ella and William Maneely
Emily Ihara
Frank Swithers
Heidi Forrest
Irene Griff and Mark Hasegawa
Jane Blechman
John Sutch
Joran and Ann Stegner
Jordan Ortiz
Kathleen Kelly
Kelli Gary Higgins
Ken and Nori Nakamura
Kio Kanda
Lan-Huong T Hoang Conservatee
Lani Pham & Pierre Karen*

*Lillian Kashihara
Lisa and Greg Nakamura
Mark LaWall
Mary Okamoto
Michelle Amano
Ngoc-Yen Vu
Norm and Gail Kondo
Paul Q. Piper
Rebecca Perry And William Nelson
Reiko and Hisao Matsumoto
Robert Fike
Romesh Deora
Ron and Fujie Ohata
Ron and Nora Nagatani Trust
Sarah Barlow
Shigeko Walton
Stanley Fujii
Stuart Ott
Susan Grimes
Susan Kasa and Stephen Nishigawa
Thomas Griffin
Tida and Art Rask
Tim and Susan Cathcart
Toyoko Miyashiro
William Robertson
Wolf Run Foundation
Yuko and Toshiaki Keicho*

Memory Dana

*Arlene and Wayne Minami
Mary Okamoto for Komani
Kaluchi*

Kalavinka

Managing Editor: Andrea A. Walter
Assistant Editors: Ken Nakamura, Michael Galvin

Sangha members and community businesses can publish **advertisements in Kalavinka**. Please contact us for information!

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www.ekoji.org

Join us at Ekoji!

Adult Service: Sundays at 11 a.m.

Meditation: Thursdays at 8 p.m.

Children's Dharma School (Sept. through June):

10 a.m. family service and 11 a.m. classes

Consult the Ekoji website for the complete event calendar at www.ekoji.org.



EKOJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE

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Fairfax Station, VA 22039

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FIRST CLASS