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Makawao Hongwanji
Sunday, June 4, 2000, 9:00 am

To cry over spilt milk
Is time wasted;
To grumble over other's
Misdeeds creates negativity;
Instead, to count our blessings
Brings us true joy.
And we call the Name Namoamidabutsu
To affirm our blessedness.

Namoamidabutsu

Good Morning Everyone:

Welcome to our Sunday Service. Also, welcome to our awards day(Dharma School) Well, the school year is winding down and soon summer vacation will be upon us. We've been having graduation exercises in different schools this past week, and just about all the schools will have finished their graduation exercises today.

Graduation from Middle School, High School and college are important milestones in the lives of our youngsters. Graduation is a commencement from one phase in life to another and it's a promise that more and better things will be coming for the graduates. There will be both the enjoyment and the responsibility for such things as developing new interests and skills, making new friends or strengthening the bonds of old friendships, and finally preparing for a professional career and finding one's life time mate.

But more basic to these things is that life presents the means for people to develop their character, so that they can begin to deepen themselves and appreciate life of others more. I feel good character comes not from being negative and critical of others, but from being thankful for who we are. One thing that comes to mind is how some people tend to be negative so that they seem to be griping and grumbling all the time (i.e., being Monkutare). Nothing is good enough for them. And sometimes rather than doing something about the problem, they only gripe and criticize. They lose their true character when they do that. And the situation or problem persists because nothing is done to resolve the problem.

There is a story concerning this behavior. Once, long ago, there lived a king in a country across the sea. He was a wise king and spared no effort to help his people.

a. King's stone on highway
b. King's search for happy people
c. Hameda's eels.

a.

But he was especially concerned about people who complained but did nothing to help fix the problem.

a. So one night when everyone else slept, he had his men place a large stone in the road that led past his castle. Then they hid behind a hedge and waited to see what would happen. First came a farmer with his wagon heavily loaded with grain, which he was taking to the mill to be ground into flour. When he saw the stone, he said angrily, "How dangerous it is. Someone must have been careless." As he drove the team of horses around the stone he yelled, "Why doesn't someone remove the stone from the road?" He continued to complain about the stone, but he did nothing about it as he went on his way.

Next came a young soldier, who was singing loudly and being boisterous. He had a long feather in his cap and a shiny sword at his side. He was day dreaming about how brave he would be in battle and how he would win the hearts of the young ladies. Suddenly his foot bumped against the stone and he went sprawling into the dust. He was both surprised and angry at the same time. As he rose to his feet he began yelling and screaming about who had left the stone on the road and why didn't someone remove it before someone got hurt. As he hobbled away, he glared at the stone, swearing under his breath.

a. Others passed by the stone throughout the day and they all complained about the danger or inconvenience, but none would lift a finger to move the stone. Toward nightfall, four young ladies who were working in the mill passed by the stone and they were tired from working from early morning. But they said that it was getting dark and someone may stumble over the stone at night and could be badly hurt. So they all helped to tug and push and pull on the stone until it was moved to the side of the road. When they did that they found a box in a hole underneath where the stone had been. On it was a note that said, "This box belongs to those who remove the stone" When they opened it, it was full of gold. The young ladies shared the gold and all went home with happy hearts.

When the news spread about what had happened, the people flocked to the road in front of the castle to look at the stone. The King appeared and said, "We often find obstacles and burdens in our way. We may complain out loud while we walk around

them. Rather than just getting upset and disappointed we should do something to solve the problem.

The message we get from this simple story is that when there is a difficulty or a problem, do not just complain or blame others about it. We should do something to resolve the problem. In that way, we begin to develop good habits, good character and we can be better adjusted in life.

In life it is easy to find fault with others, or to blame others for the problems we have. Sometimes we may not be aware that we are doing that. That is why it is important that from time to time we should count our blessings and think about all the things that we can be grateful for beginning with our life itself.

One day the king became very, very sick and his doctors and wise men tried many ways to cure him, but nothing worked. Just when people were giving up hope, the king's maid spoke up. She said, "I will tell you how to save the king. If you find a happy man, take the shirt from his back, and put it on the king. Then he will recover. So messengers were sent out to look for a happy man. However, no one seemed content; everyone had some complaint. At a farmer's home they heard the farmer grumble to his wife, "What's wrong with our children? They never do what we say. And they make so much noise. Don't they have any manners?" At a rich man's home they heard the man complain that the tailor had made his expensive suit too small for him. And the food that the cook prepared did not taste just right. At another home, the man complained that the roof leaked and why can't the government fix it, and so on. The king's messengers were having a very difficult time finding a happy home.

Finally, the king's own son was passing by a small cottage when he heard the man talking, "I am grateful for all of my blessings. I've finished my daily work and I was able to help my neighbor. I've eaten my simple dinner and I can now lie down and sleep in peace. What more could I want?" The prince rejoiced to have found a happy man at last. He gave orders to pay the man any amount of money he wanted for his shirt and took the shirt to the king who soon recovered from his illness.

In this story happiness was found in a man who was thankful for whatever little he had. While the others had a lot more possessions, they were not satisfied with what they had. Happiness does not come with receiving more and more things. Happiness

comes when we can appreciate what we already have. Happiness comes when we can accept who we are, just as we are. When we live in a world of gratitude, life becomes more forgiving and there is more healing.

We should live life with faith, and while we may expect the best, we should accept whatever comes our way. We can take joy in success or good fortune, but all is not lost when there is failure or misfortune. We can learn from our failures and achieve greater successes later on. Also, we are strengthened in subtle ways when we meet misfortune and we can become better people as a result.

Dr. Nobuo Haneda, who was the speaker at our Jodo Shinshu Seminar held here in March told the following story when he was in Hawaii previously. In Japan, as you know people love to eat unagi or fresh water eel. Eel is a delicacy in Japan and most of it is grown in Kyushu, the southern island. The people of Tokyo demand to have fresh eels, but when the eels were shipped by train from Kyushu to Tokyo, most of the eels died during the ten hour trip. The scientist tried to figure out some inexpensive way to ship the eels alive to Tokyo. They thought of using a special container or putting some chemical in the water, but they found it did not work or it was too expensive. What they then did, was to put a tiny scar on the side of the eels' body with a knife. It was not a large scar, otherwise the eels would die immediately. The eels with the tiny scars were placed in the water tank and shipped to Tokyo. When they were examined after the ten hour trip, they were found to be all alive. The scar forced the eels to wriggle and struggle during the trip causing them to survive the long journey. So the message ~~they~~ we get from that was that if life is too easy, we do not learn anything new. If we only ~~live~~ in fortunate circumstances, we do not need to change for the better. It is only through our experiencing challenges or difficulties in life that we grow and develop into mature human beings. This is because as the Buddha has taught us, that to live is to suffer in many ways. We can never change that fact. But the important thing is not the event itself, but it is the way we react to misfortunes. The way we react to things makes a great difference. If we're upset about every little thing in life, life become^s more and more unhappy. If we're grumbling and blaming others all the time for whatever misfortune that has happened, we will never learn the lesson from the incident or learn to change for the better.

Instead, if we can learn from our experiences in life, if we can accept our errors and misfortunes as means to achieving success at a later time in life, if we can appreciate life itself as our teacher, teaching us invaluable lessons about living, then we will be better equipped to face the challenges ahead of us. When the night is the darkest, that is when we begin to see the first sign of dawn light up the horizon. So rather than dwelling on the dark, anticipate the light, you might say anticipate the light of Amida Buddha which will reveal the blessings that are ours.

Shinran Shonin has taught us that to be aware of our blessings and to have a heart of thankfulness is the ultimate in religious life. Gratitude is ^athe life of trust rather than ^athe life of doubt. He is saying that the core, the center of religious life, is a life of thanksgiving. This is recognizing and acknowledging the flow of blessings from the universe, which is being extended to us unceasingly. When we recite the Nembutsu, we are expressing our gratitude in a spiritual language. Let us live the life of Nembutsu, the life of gratitude.

In closing, I would like to repeat the passage I read at the beginning of my talk.

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Instead, to count our blessings brings us true joy.

And we call the Name, Namoamidabutsu

to affirm our blessedness."

Namoamidabutsu

Graduation time

Monkutaru

Shuy - king & stonier
middle of road

Shuy - shirt for happy
man for ill king

Sing Dr. Nobuo Hara
celebrate to live