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Wh.way 12/23/00

White Way Broadcast

Saturday, December 23, 2000

*on gratitude
of Hisako Nakamura*

Goodmorning Everyone:

December may well be recognized as the month of Light by different religions. Christians display colorful lights to celebrate Christmas. Jews observe Hanukkah, the Jewish Feast of Lights by lighting the Menorah. Buddhists celebrate Bodhi Day on December 8, the day when Siddhartha Gautama attained En-LIGHT-enment and became the Buddha, the Supremely Awakened One. Light in Buddhism refers to Infinite Wisdom which transcends this world of birth and death and brightens our way to a life of peace and *harmony.*

As you may know, for the past six years, Mililani Hongwanji members have been putting up the Bodhi Day display at the Honolulu City Hall grounds as a participant in the Honolulu City Lights Festival. Have you gone to see it yet? This year it is *in a good location* facing King Street next to the City Hall building, where many Christmas trees are on display. Every year the location of the display is decided by lottery and this year, Mililani Hongwanji has been fortunate in getting it's present location. Please go to see the display. It depicts the maiden Sujata offering gruel of rice and milk to *an emaciated Siddhartha* who ^{then} restores his health and goes on to attain Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree.

Mahayana Buddhists have designated December 8th as Bodhi Day, which may be said to be the anniversary of the founding of Buddhism. It is the day Siddhartha discovered the Light of Wisdom, but Shin Buddhists believe that the source of the Light is the Eternal (spiritual) Buddha who is called Amida Buddha. Shinran Shonin has written:

Dr. Ty Unno says, while the light of the sun and moon illuminates the earth, it does not penetrate objects and it casts shadows. On the other hand, Amida's Light penetrates even the hardest substance in the world, which is the shell of the human ego, and it never casts shadows. In other words, nothing can obstruct Amida's illumination. His Light dispels darkness and ignorance, that is why it is called the Light of Wisdom. Amida's Wisdom, and therefore, His Compassion, reaches all corners of the universe. And, we all are recipients of His Compassion, even though we may ^{or may} not ask for it, and perhaps, we may not really deserve it. So let us count our blessings and live the life of Nembutsu, which is the life of gratitude.

But there are those who say their lives have not been happy, or they have seen so many misfortunes... what can they be grateful for? I'm sure we have all asked ourselves such questions. And, simple answers may not suffice. So I would like to tell you the story of Hisako Nakamura. You may have heard the story before, ^{it is well known} but please listen again. It gives us a very meaningful message.

Hisako Nakamura grew up in the cold mountainous region of Takayama City in Gifu Prefecture. At the age of three, she lost both hands and both feet due to gangrene caused by frost bite. The family was poor and could not afford medical care. Her father loved her and tried to cater to her wishes, but he died from a heart attack not too long after her misfortune. Because there was no way her mother could support herself and Hisako, she married a widower with three children. Hisako's stepfather was an uncaring person, and treated her like an unwanted child. He would yell at her, "Don't show your face outside the door," and he kept her upstairs to play all by herself.

At another time, when her mother wanted to enroll her in school, the stepfather said, "a deformed child doesn't need an education," and kept her at home.

In order to survive, Hisako, at the age of 20, became part of a traveling carnival. She had become a mise mono or a show piece. Although she felt humiliated, she traveled all over Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria as the Daruma Lady (Daruma no musume) performing before curious crowds. As

people watched her, she sewed doll kimono with the needle between her teeth and lips and did calligraphy while holding the fude brush in her mouth.

One year, Helen Keller, the famous blind and deaf philanthropist, had a tearful meeting with Hisako _____ on a stage in Tokyo before an audience of 2000 people. Helen Keller recognized Hisako's ^{sufferings and courage} accomplishments and told her, "you are a person who has met more misfortunes than myself. You are a person much *greater* than myself."

When Hisako _____ was introduced to the Teachings of Shinran, she became a devoted member of the Hongwanji and though she still felt the restrictions of her handicaps, she wrote the following poem:

quote "The suffering of being without hands and feet /
was made the condition that allowed this most
undeserving person that I am, to be assured of Birth
in the World of greatest joy, in that world that is now
so bright with light" (unquote) *of course she was referring to the Pure Land
and difficulties*
From deep awareness of her imperfections, she was able to open up to

the great treasure house of Amida Buddha's pervasive Compassion. That is, she became aware of her ultimate salvation. Thus she was able to write:

quote "This difficult to live life /
That I am now allowed to live,
This difficult-to-come-in contact with happiness /
That I am now in contact with,
This difficult-to-hear true Dharma /
That Shinran Sama allowed me to hear,
Today, too, I am allowed to express my yearning /
Within the Nembutsu
Truly/truly I thank you." (unquote)

The story of Hisako Nakamura teaches us that regardless of how tragic our life may be, or how gross the indignities we may suffer, we always have something to be grateful for. Through our life's experiences, happy or sad, we come to learn that Amida's Light of Compassion shine on us incessantly showing us that we are embraced by the Other power, just as

we are. That, in this life and the next, we are bound within His love and
Like Hisako, let us be empowered by Amida's Light and we are never abandoned.

so that we can live our lives to the fullest.

Next time we are wondering whether we have anything to be grateful for in life, let us remember Hisako Nakamura's story. And let us recall the significance of Light in Buddhism and ^{remember} recite the passage in the Shinshu Pledge:

"I adore the Light of the Buddha. I will put my effort in my work with self reflection and gratitude."
NamoAmidaButsu

Gratitude
Life of Hisako Nakamura
Remembered each life

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