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Makawao Hongwanji  
Sunday Service, April 16, 2000  
9:00 am

Quietly we put our hands  
Together and in our hearts  
We give thanks to Amida  
Buddha for his Great Compassion  
And love for us.  
Namuamidabutsu

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a. Birth of Buddha  
b. woman at the well  
c. Star child: arrogant person transformed to a good person

Good morning everyone:

Welcome to our Sunday morning service. With the coming of spring there seems to be an increase in activities. Now its harvesting and pickling peaches. If you have the time, please help out with this activity which is very important to our temple. Maui held its Hanamatsuri celebration on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, <sup>so it may be somewhat late but</sup> and I would like to say something about the founder of our religion while we are still in the month of April.

As you know April 8<sup>th</sup> is the day which Mahayana Buddhists recognize as the <sup>day of the</sup> birth of the Buddha. He was born in the year, 563 BCE and at the age 35, he became the Buddha, the Awakened One. I'm sure you remember the story: King Sudhodana and Queen Maya were childless for many years and they were about to resign themselves to not having any heir to the throne, when one evening Queen Maya had a wonderful dream. A white elephant appeared and entered the right side of her body. She became heavy with child. When the day drew near for the baby to come, as was the custom in those days, she prepared to return to her parents' home to have the baby. Along the way, the entourage rested at the beautiful Lumbini Garden. As Queen Maya rose from her couch to pluck a twig of the red Asoka blossoms, she gave birth to the prince, Siddharta Gautama. Legend says the earth shook and there were beautiful sounds in the air and sweet nectar fell from the sky. Remarkably the Baby Buddha stood up and took seven steps and with the right hand pointing to heaven and left to earth, he proclaimed, "heaven above and earth below, I alone am the world's honored one." These were miraculous events which historians say probably never happened - ~~and probably, they are correct.~~ These are not historical events occurring on the physical level, but religious events occurring at the spiritual level. The birth of the Buddha is not experienced with our eyes and ears, but <sup>by</sup> with the hearts. The significance

a.  
Birth of Buddha

is not at the physical plane, but at the spiritual. Within the birth scene is found the abbreviated life of the Buddha. The seven steps the Baby Buddha took symbolize the crossing over the six stages of existence such as hell, hungry ghosts and fighting animals and finally reaching the seventh level which is Buddhahood. The proclamation "Heaven above, earth below, I alone am the world's honored one," <sup>actually should</sup> come after he had attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The proclamation, however, does not refer to one person. The Buddha is speaking as a representative of the human race. He is leading the way, <sup>and</sup> anyone who wishes to can follow Him and reap the spiritual benefits. The Buddha had opened His heart to all sentient beings.

a.

The sage Asita came to see the child and made the prediction that the child would either become a World conqueror or a Great Saint and wept that he would not live long enough to see that day. The King and Queen were overjoyed and named their son Siddhartha, meaning "Every wish fulfilled."

As it worked out, the king and his men could not hide human sufferings from Siddhartha Gautama. <sup>So</sup> Siddhartha renounced the easy life of a prince and left home in search of spiritual truth. After going to several teachers and practicing various austerities, he found that they did not help. <sup>Then with his body weak and emaciated</sup> He then bathed in the River Naranjara and received rice gruel from the village maiden, Sujata. He restored his health and meditated under the Bodhi Tree and <sup>eventually</sup> attained enlightenment. In that way, he became one of the greatest religious leaders the world had ever <sup>known.</sup>

In his missionary work, <sup>The Buddha</sup> he did not discriminate among people and welcomed only some into his Sangha and closed his doors to others. He was especially unhappy about the caste system which discriminated people into different classes and did not allow people from one class to associate with people in another class. Broadly speaking, <sup>the Hindu caste places</sup> the Brahmins were the highest <sup>level</sup> class, followed by the warrior class, merchant class, the craftsmen, and <sup>finally</sup> the untouchables. The untouchable class included people who were involved in hunting and fishing and other work which involved killing animals, handling dead bodies or doing, dirty work which people in other classes did not want to do. The Buddha accepted these people as brothers and sisters and welcomed them as equals.

b.

The present day Hindu religion still practices the caste system and in 1955, 500,000 untouchable people renounced their Hindu religion and converted to

Buddhism. Since then some of the Indian Buddhists have been able to achieve high positions in the government and in education. However, the Buddhist religion has always preached and practiced equality and tolerance of differences among people. There is a parable that gives us this lesson.

*Parable of woman at the well*

Ananda, the favorite disciple of the Buddha, traveled to a distant place on a mission for the Buddha, i.e., Sakyamuni Buddha the historical Buddha. On his return trip home it was a hot and dry day and as he passed by the outskirts of a village, he saw a maiden drawing water from a well. Being very thirsty, he approached the girl and asked for some water to drink. To his surprise, she refused to serve him explaining that she was of the untouchable Matanga tribe. She did not want to serve him because she was afraid that she would contaminate his holiness. When he heard this, the wise Ananda replied, "I asked not for your caste, I asked for water." There upon the Matanga maiden joyfully served him the cool drink. Later on, she became a member of the Sangha.

In this short and simple story, Ananda was saying it did not matter to which social class, race, economic status or sex the maiden belonged to; they are irrelevant, not important. Just like himself, she has value because she is a human being and <sup>he</sup> respected her for that.

By his simple act of accepting the water, Ananda transformed the life of the Matanga maiden, for she felt alive and happy. She was able to sense the value and dignity of her life, just as she was, in spite of what she was taught by parents and neighbors before. At that moment she began her journey of awakening to her Buddha nature. This is the Buddhist way to transform lives through such simple acts of kindness and thoughtfulness.

There are <sup>out</sup> ways to help people find who they are. ~~There~~ is a children's story of a man who <sup>had to</sup> struggle in life to find out that he was someone special. He was found as a baby in the forest by a poor woodcutter who had seen a falling star land in the forest. He ran to see if he could find gold, but instead found a baby and took him home. As the <sup>the star child</sup> baby grew up, he became more beautiful to look at and he also became more arrogant. One day, a poor beggar-woman passed through the village and when she heard that a boy had been found in the forest, she knew that he was her son. But,

*C. star child*

when she told him that she was his mother, he told her. "Why, you are just an ugly old beggar in rags. Get away from me." The mother was so hurt by what the boy said, that she turned his face into that of a toad and left the village crying. The son now had a face like a toad, so no one would play with him or have anything to do with him. He realized that he must find his mother and apologize to her or he would never be normal again. So for three years he searched for his mother, but could not overtake her. She was always out of reach.

Then one day he was captured and sold as a slave. His new master was a magician and he told him there are three pieces of gold hidden in the forest near the city gate. He ordered the boy to find the gold pieces or he will be beaten up. <sup>The boy</sup> He could not find any pieces of gold. But he found a rabbit caught in a trap and released him. As a reward, the rabbit showed him where the gold pieces were. The boy took the gold pieces and hurried to take them to his master. But a leper at the city gate asked for money because he was starving and the boy first refused, but finally <sup>felt sorry for him</sup> gave in and handed the gold pieces to the leper. When the boy returned to his master and explained what had happened, he was beaten and thrown into the dungeon. Next morning, when he got up, <sup>to his surprise</sup> he saw his mother, who was the beggar woman whom he was looking for, standing nearby and he rushed over and kneeling down he asked for forgiveness for being so hateful to her. His mother placed her hand on his head and said, "Rise". The leper was also standing next to him and he placed his hand on his head and said, "Rise", also.

C. Star Child

When he rose, his appearance had changed and he looked every bit the handsome prince, and standing next to him were the king and queen. <sup>The</sup> leper had turned into the king and his ugly mother had turned into the queen. And they were smiling happily that he had changed from a cruel child into a loving and kind person. They set the crown on his head and the scepter in his hand, and blessed him as the new ruler of the land.

So, we see that people <sup>change positively when</sup> we are kind to them, or we can change ourselves by being kind to others, the way the star-child did. Compassion <sup>positively</sup> transforms people. The Buddha was born in this world to bring us this message. The suffering in this world can finally come to an end, when we can learn this message and

practice it. And we must not forget that we are constantly receiving the infinite compassion of the Other Power. In closing I wish to recite the passage:

Quietly we put our hands  
 Together and in our hearts  
 We give thanks to Amida  
 Buddha for his Great Compassion  
 And love for us.

NamoAmidaButsu

Birth of Buddha  
 Historical legend to  
 religious symbolism  
 Missionary work -  
 disliked caste system  
 : Story of Ananda -  
 Untouchables at well  
 Story of Star Child -  
 handsome, but cruel