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Makawao Hongwanji, Sermon
Sunday Service, April 9, 2000

a. ✓ Ugly duckling
b. ✓ Eleanor Roosevelt

When we entrust ourselves
Without any doubt to the
Tathagata's Vow, we are taken
Into the light that grasps, and
Without fail the enlightenment of
Great nirvana is made to unfold
In us; that is, ~~for hunters and peddlers,~~
It is like stones and tiles and pebbles
Being made to become gold.

From the notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone"
NamoAmidaButsu

Good Morning Everyone:

Welcome to Makawao Hongwanji Sunday service. Well, last Sunday the Maui Buddhist Council held its annual Joint Hanamatsuri Service at Wailuku community Center. Seven Buddhist temples joined together to celebrate the birth of Siddharta Gautama who attained Buddhahood 2,500 years ago in India. Besides the service there were entertainment, games, bingo and lots of food. We should thank Barb Doi and her students for representing Makawao Hongwanji and doing a dance number.

Also, right after this morning's service the Fujinkai ladies will hold a special service to honor Eshinni, the wife of our founder, Shinran Shonin. Eshinni, as you may know was a devout follower of the Nembutsu path and a devoted wife of the charismatic Shinran and a dedicated mother of six children. I believe her presence and support of Shinran's efforts made it possible for her husband to complete his missionary work. Since most of you will not be attending that service, I wanted you all to know why we're not having our Dharma sharing session today.

Well, the quotation I read : *is* by Shinran Shonin and he is saying that those who entrust in Amida Buddha are transformed like from pebbles and broken tiles into precious gold. Even hunters and peddlers who must kill living things to make a living are turned into precious beings. Amida Buddha has so much compassion and love for each one of us that He has embraced us never to abandon, in this physical realm as well as in the next spiritual world.

The point I wish to make is that if Amida Buddha is willing to love us and transform our lives into valuable existences, we too should be willing to love ourselves.

a.

We should be willing to love not only our spiritual selves, but also our physical selves. This is not meant to be an egocentric statement, but a ^{statement of} willingness to accept ourselves as we are and not ^{to} let anyone else tell us who we are or whether we are acceptable or not. In the Golden Chain of Love we are encouraged to be kind and gentle to every living thing, but we should not forget ourselves. It is just as important to love ourselves and to love ourselves just as we are. Sometimes we find it hard to do this.

For instance, many of us see attractive movie stars and say they are beautiful, but me, I don't measure up. We say, I'm too short, ^{or too tall,} my eyes are too far apart, ^{or too close,} my belly is a pouch and find many reasons to say I'm not beautiful. Instead we should be saying I am unique, and just as I am, I'm beautiful or handsome.

You've heard of the story of the Ugly Duckling by Hans Christian Anderson. He was a little bigger than the other ducklings and ~~his color was grayish~~. ^{His color was greyish} And so the other ducks and chickens scolded him and bit him for being different, until he was driven away into the wilderness. Even the wild geese criticized him as being ugly so he began thinking that indeed he was ugly and no one could like him as he was. He then wandered into an old woman's cottage and there was a hen who could lay eggs and a cat who could purr and give out sparks. They asked him what special thing he could do and he answered, well, he loves to swim in the pond and dive to the bottom. They criticized him that neither the hen nor the cat nor the old lady loved to do that. That's a useless pleasure. So the duckling felt the rejection and left the house.

Later, when winter approached and he was trapped by frozen ice in the pond, a farmer saved him by cracking the ice with his wooden shoe and took him home. It felt warm and cozy there, but when the children of the house wanted to play with him, he panicked and flew around the house knocking a pail of milk over and he also fell into a tub of butter. The family chased him out of the house into the cold winter. He felt so humiliated and rejected by the whole world.

But the Ugly Duckling was growing all the while, and when spring came, he could flap his wings and he felt stronger. He found himself in a great garden with beautiful flowers and trees. Then he saw three glorious white swans swimming toward him. They looked beautiful and the ugly duckling thought I will swim toward them because they are royal birds. They may hate me and may even kill me, but it's better by them

a.
ugly
Duckling

than by ducks and fowls and people. He bent his head toward the water expecting something terrible to happen when what he saw in the water was his own reflection which was that of a swan, just like those three beautiful birds swimming toward him. The ugly duckling was really a swan, the most beautiful and splendid bird anywhere. He had found out who he was and felt a sense of happiness he had not experienced before.

Ugly Duckling

This story of the ugly duckling in part tells us that if we start to believe what others think or say about us rather than how we should feel about ourselves, we are giving others power over us. Regardless of what others think or whatever limitations we see in ourselves, we should see ourselves, as beautiful people. Just as we are, being human beings, we should accept ourselves as a valuable and worthy person. We are already accepted by Amida Buddha as such. Why should we put ourselves down. Like the swan, we should see our reflection in the mirror and say, "I'm a human being. I'm the most beautiful person in the world."

great change in life.

There is a ~~true~~ story of a person who went through ~~this transformation~~. As a young girl this person was plain looking and she always felt her mother was disappointed in her. Her mother told people that she was "such a funny child, so old fashioned that we call her granny." The mother brought up her child to have good manners so that somehow it would make up for her plain looks, but the more her mother tried, the more she felt that she was a disappointment. She became shy and withdrawn, full of fears and starved for affection and appreciation. At age 8, her mother died of diphtheria and at 10 her father died from the effects of alcoholism. So her two brothers and she went to live with their grandmother.

Eleanor

So from an early age, she knew loneliness and unhappiness, but fortunately at age 15 she was sent to England to attend a finishing school. The French head mistress took a liking to her and through her love and caring, Eleanor blossomed and became self confident and developed warm relationships with her classmates. At age 19, she married Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a distant cousin who rose in politics, becoming Governor of New York in 1924 and president of the United States in 1932. Eleanor Roosevelt, herself, grew in stature, becoming a humanitarian *helping the poor and the weak and is now regarded as* one of the greatest women in American history.

Her life was radically changed when she felt the love and caring of the head mistress of the finishing school. For by feeling that she was loved, she could love herself, too, just as she was. I'm sure she regarded herself as a kind of a beautiful person regardless of how others thought of her. In the same way, when we can open our eyes to Amida's love and compassion for us, hopefully, we will be able to see the value and beauty within us, just as we are. And when we can see ourselves as beautiful people, then we will also be able to see others as beautiful people, just as they are. We must get off the negative attitude about ourselves and see the beauty within us, just as we are. Then, ^{just} as we recite in the Shinshu Pledge we can say "I rejoice in the compassion of the Buddha; I will respect and help others and do my best for the welfare of mankind."

When we entrust ourselves without any doubt to the Tathagata's Vow, we are taken into the light that grasps, and without fail the enlightenment of Great Nirvana is made to unfold in us; ^{that is it} this is like stones + tiles + pebbles being made to become gold.

— Shinran

Love ourselves

Story - Ugly Dressing

Story - Eleanor
Roosevelt

Shinshu Pledge