

When I became a Hawaii Kyodan minister forty years ago, the Giseikai was held in August, was conducted mainly in Japanese, and the sessions last four days. Most delegates stayed at the Pali Hilton, a name which was given to the Hawaii Betsuin dormitory, and this social hall had no air conditioning. "All is impermanent."

Time passed and many things have changed. Now, Giseikai is held in February for two days only and is held in an air conditioned hall. And, the meetings are conducted in English. Because there is no Pali Hilton today, most of our neighbor island participants stay at hotels.

These changes clearly show us that times have changed. Also, we are at a turning point to make Buddhism in Hawaii not only an extension of Japanese Traditional Buddhism, but an American Buddhism which all Americans can understand and accept. However, please do not misunderstand. We are not changing the teaching. The teaching will never change. What we have been trying is to adjust the means and ways of how to propagate in present times and to provide broader interpretation of the teaching to propagate in this country of different religion, language, tradition, custom, life-style, and ways of thinking.

Have you ever heard of the name "Jyokan Chikazumi?" He was a very well known Buddhist scholar and priest in Japan during 1900 and 1930s. He opened his Dharma Center called "Koko-do" near Tokyo University and delivered Dharma talks very Sunday. Many students of Tokyo University, as well as other universities, came to listen to his Dharma talks. Among the listeners of his Dharma talks were future leaders and distinguished scholars in many fields in Japan. His Dharma talks greatly influenced their future.

However, what is so surprising is that Reverend Chikazumi told the same stories at Dharma talks on Sundays for over twenty years as this is the essence of Jodo Shinshu.

Legend has it that when Dr. Albert Einstein, the scientist of all scientists of the 20th Century, visited Japan, he requested to meet a person who could tell him what kind of religion the Japanese people believed in. The person who was taking care of Dr. Einstein took him to meet Reverend Chikazumi. Reverend Chikazumi told Dr. Einstein the same story which he was delivering every Sunday and told him that this is our religion. Upon hearing what Reverend Chikazumi said, Dr. Einstein shook Reverend Chikazumi's hands with tears in his eyes and said, "Oh, the Japanese people are lucky because they have such a wonderful religion."

Two of my teachers at Ryukoku University, Professor Dr. Jyoin Shirai and Professor Dr. Gibun Uyeda were regular attendants of Chikazumi Sensei's Dharma sessions when they were students at the Tokyo University. Therefore, I asked both Senseis why they continued to listen to the same sermon. Their answers were almost the same and very simple. They said that they felt new emotions or a new meaning each time they listened to Chikazumi Sensei's Dharma talk according to their spiritual condition or atmosphere of that day. So they felt that they were listening to something new each time. My counselor and a good friend, Mr. Mel Hayase of Samaritan Counseling Center and a member of Mililani Hongwanji Mission, once told me that when he saw a Korean Soap Opera in the afternoon and watched the same show in the evening, he felt as though he was watching a new show.

By the way, what Reverend Chikazumi talked about every Sunday was the story of "Ubasuteyama." Do you know the "Ubasuteyama" story? This is a very famous story in Japan and many ministers used to use this story for their sermon. The story goes like this:

There is a mountain in Japan named "Ubasuteyama." It is so named because long ago, the people living at the base of the mountain were so poor that those unable to help grow food were abandoned on the mountain. This is what "Ubasuteyama" means; "mountain-to-leave-old-parents and grandparents."

Even one extra person who did not help was a great burden to the others. Thus, when people became old and unable to work, they were taken to "Ubasuteyama" to die, even one's own parents.

Once there was a farmer living at the base of "Ubasuteyama" who loved his mother very much because she was always thinking of him and doing things for him. This farmer had a large family to support, but his farm was quite small and it was very difficult for him to feed them all. As long as his mother helped, he and his family could somehow scrape enough to get by.

But the time came when the mother was so old and feeble that she could no longer be of any help. Thus, according to the village custom, the farmer decided to take his mother up "Ubasuteyama." The farmer did not want to abandon his mother anymore than you would want to abandon your mother. But he also had to think of his wife and children. If he did not take his mother up the mountain, his family would go hungry. Besides, everyone in the village did it.

Finally, the day to take his mother up the mountain arrived. The mother was old and feeble. The farmer carried her on his back. She had worked so hard and was so old that she felt more like a child on his back than an adult.

As the farmer walked up "Ubasuteyama," the mother broke a branch off a tree from time to time and dropped it to the ground. Finally, they arrived at the site where the old and feeble were traditionally left. The farmer put his mother down and with tears in his eyes said, "Goodbye. We must part here."

The farmer's mother looked lovingly at her son and said, "Now that you are this deep in the mountain, you will probably find it difficult to get back. In order to help you find your way back, I have left a trail of broken branches to help you to return home."

The son was taken aback by his mother's words. He thought, "Here I brought my mother high into the mountain to abandon her. But rather than thinking of herself, my mother is still thinking of me. How can I possibly abandon such a mother? I would rather go hungry than live without her." The farmer placed his mother on his back again and returned home.

The mother's attitude is like Amida Buddha's, who is always concerned for us, even when we do not think of him. How many of us can say we are good Buddhists? How often do we forget Amida Buddha, or act contrary to the Buddha's teaching? But even as we do so, Amida Buddha's wisdom and compassion is radiated toward us, just as the mother's love for her son, in spite of his desire to abandon her in the mountains.

This is a story which depicts what kind of Hotokesama Amida Buddha is. We cannot change the great compassionate mind of Amida Buddha, no matter how much the way of thinking of the people of that era changed. In other words, we cannot change the teaching of the Buddha but we can change how to approach the story we like to use to describe the teaching.

I do not know if the meeting between Chikazumi Sensei and Dr. Einstein had a major impact on Dr. Einstein or not, but in his later years, Dr. Einstein said, "The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and the theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense of arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description." Honestly speaking, I do not understand the full depth of what Dr. Einstein said but I do understand that Dr. Einstein's expectations of Buddhism will play a vital role for the betterment of all beings. Yes, to me it became very clear for us that Buddhism can play a major role for true world peace. After the September 11 events, this has become even more clear than ever before.

By the way, when I was a young minister at Paia Hongwanji Mission, I did what Chikazumi Sensei did and talked about the story of Ubasuteyama. When I told the story for the second time, it appeared as though they listened intently. But before I could talk about it for the third time, an Obaachan came to see me and asked if I was going to tell the story about the mountain to where old people are abandoned. I told her, "I am not going to talk about the mountain where old people were taken but about the great compassionate mind of Amida Buddha." Obaachan said, "But Sensei, you are going to use what you call a "Ubasuteyama story" again yeah?" I said, "Yes, because it is a good story to describe the Buddha's mind." "Yamate! Do not do that. Because I am old and all people attending the service are my age or older, we do not want to hear the story that old people are abandoned. We feel that we are useless when we hear that story. Instead, tell us more happy stories."

With those comments, I gave up the idea to copy Chikazumi Sensei and have never told that story again in my Dharma talks. However, for the first time in 30 years, I am telling the story of Ubasuteyama, not because I want you to know this story, but because I want you to realize the great compassionate mind of Amida Buddha through this story, like Dr. Einstein did.

The point I wish to make this morning is, as Dr. Albert Einstein predicted many years ago, I, too, believe that Buddhism is the answer to our troubled world. Therefore, please take pride in your heritage and be proud of being a Buddhist and, with confidence, please share the Great Compassionate mind of Amida Buddha with as many people as you can, starting with your family members, relatives, and friends. Let us try to enlarge the circle of our Dharma Ohana.

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