

## A Surprise Encounter

Part Eight of a Nine Part Series by Reverend Shindo Nishiyama

Buddha and Shindo are sitting in Starbucks Coffee in Kalihi.

Shindo: Buddha, how's your coffee?

Buddha: Well, this is my first time I've had coffee, and it's good!

Shindo: Oh, great! I am glad that you enjoy Starbucks coffee! I usually don't come to Starbucks. It's expensive. I like to go to Seven-Eleven to get coffee and snacks because they are reasonable.

Buddha: Thank you so much for offering me food and a place for me to stay. Because of your generosity I can continue to share the Dharma with you here in Hawaii!

Shindo: No worry, please. My offering is my pleasure for your Dharma guidance and friendship!

Buddha: Thank you! Shindo, I understand that your Sangha, Jikoen Ohana Members and Dharma Friends, is making contributions to Jikoen Temple in many ways which are not only monetary but also physical as well. Is that correct?

Shindo: Yes, Jikoen has about 130 members, from young ones to seniors. They work together to keep the temple open so it can offer services for all! I am sure that Jikoen would not be able to remain open without their dedication. They never give up. They work hard to support the temple and me in so many ways. That is how I am able to share the Buddha Dharma to help them live their everyday lives in peace.

Buddha: Yes, because of Sangha members, Jikoen is what it is. Because of your ministry here at Jikoen, they are who they are. Because of lay members, you are here at Jikoen as a minister. This is the Universal Truth of Interdependency. You told me before you are the father of two children. You can't be a father without them, and your children can't be your children without you. However, we sometimes misunderstand, and we think that "I" comes first and "they" are second. This is a totally wrong view. Because of the gifts of others, you are what you are. A doctor is nothing without patients and patients are nothing without a doctor. Without chefs and staffs at restaurants, there are no guests and no delicious foods. Without janitors, there are no clean buildings. Without teachers, there are no students and schools. And without the Dharma, we are

not able to see the world as it is. Shindo, we are all alive because we are all interconnected in this world! If you realize this truth, you can live with appreciation every day of your life. Your life is not only yours. This is the Truth of Interdependency.

Shindo: I understand. I will keep it in my mind. Buddha, I understand that at your first sermon, just after you became the “Enlightened One,” you spoke to five followers at Deer Park, outside of Varanasi. You spoke about the Four Sufferings. Can you tell me more?

Buddha: Okay Shindo. As you know, I was a son of Queen Maya and King Suddhodhana in the Kingdom of Shakya. I had a life of wealth and luxury in the palace with everything that I wished for. I was expected to be the next King and my parents protected me well. So, I never had chances to see the outside world. As a child and young man, I lived only in the palace.

One day, I wanted to see the real outside world. So, I decided to leave the palace to see. The first day when I went out, I saw an old man with white hair, withered skin, walking very slowly with a cane. It was the first time I saw such an old man because there were no old men and women in the palace. My parents kept me inside the palace, and I saw only young people. I did not live in a real world. My life was surrounded by all the things that many would consider necessary for a happy life: money, fame, power, love, health, and endless entertainment with young people every day. Thus, I was very shocked to see an old man who suffered from ageing. I asked my servant, Channa, “What is this?” He explained, “Yes, Prince. Everyone grows old. o will age like him!” I had no words, and I was saddened to see the old man and wondered how he could continue suffering from aging.

On my second trip outside the palace, I saw people who sat on the ground reeking from putrid odors with no one to take care of them. Again, I was so shocked to see them and asked Channa, “What is this?” He explained, “Yes, Prince. Everyone will become sick someday. You too will become sick. Your health is not guaranteed due to causes and conditions and aging.” I had no words and returned to the palace with sadness.

Shindo: I see.

Buddha: On my third trip, I saw a funeral procession. I never saw such people crying in the procession. So, I asked Channa, “What is this?” He explained, “Yes, prince, this is the funeral service for a loved one who passed away. It is inevitable. No one can escape death.” Shindo, I was so shocked to see what real life outside of the palace was like. And I became worried and concerned about my own life.

On my last trip, I saw a monk in yellow robes with shaven head and an empty bowl. I asked Channa, "What is this?" He explained, "He is a practitioner seeking a way of escaping from the four sufferings of living, aging, sickness, and death".

Shindo: I see. So what did you do after you experienced the real world?

Buddha: I made my decision that I would leave the palace and my family and seek the path for overcoming these four sufferings.

Shindo: I see. This is what happened when you were a young man?

Buddha: Yes, but Shindo, I don't see people who are sick and dying here in Hawaii. Where are they?

Shindo: They are all in the hospitals or care homes or residences and we don't see funeral processions anymore. Our society tries to hide such negative sights such as aging, sickness and death.

Buddha: What? Negative sights? They are all very much a part of our lives! No one can escape from these sufferings as you know well!

Shindo: Yes, but aging, sickness, and death are all negative concepts in the world. People do not want to face them.

Buddha: I see. Shindo, people must understand that just as time is equal for everyone, so aging, sickness, and death are also equal for everyone. As long as we try to escape these sufferings, we will continue to suffer from them. We need to realize that the suffering that comes from living, aging, sickness, and death are inescapable parts of our lives. Acceptance is the key to becoming a person who lives life as it is, without anxiety and doubts.

Shindo: Yes, I understand well. Life is impermanent, thus today and this moment is a very precious moment to share. I am glad I can share it with you, Buddha.

Buddha: Great! Shindo, can I get another coffee? I love the Starbucks coffee! I like this milk coffee? This is very ono!

Shindo: Oh my Buddha! You are speaking like a local person! I am so happy you are enjoying your stay in Hawaii! Here, try this "Caffe Latte."

Buddha: This is called, "Caffe Latte!" I love it!

Shindo: Buddha, I have another question for you about Nirvana and Namu Amida Butsu.

Buddha: Okay, but let's enjoy our coffee first!

Shindo: Okay!

End of Part Eight