

Sermons

October 2014 - *Jukai Nyu-i* - Receiving Precepts and Joining the Ranks by Rev. Kodo Takeuchi

"Do not commit evil, but rather strive to do good works. Do not forget self-inspection. This is Buddhism." The fundamental teachings of Buddhism have been kept and handed down for approximately 2,500 years, since before the time of Shakyamuni Buddha in the "Verse of the Shared Morality of the Seven Buddhas." "Do not commit," "The capacity to avoid committing," - there is a mysterious power in this teaching. "Do no evil, but rather, do good" - when one is always striving for this, it will become impossible to do evil.

We Buddhists view good and evil according to whether one follows the Buddha's teaching or not, of course. However, Shakyamuni Buddha also inquired into himself through *zazen*, and he deeply observed the state of his disciples and the behavior of humans in general. He sought diligently to learn "what must never be done by each precious individual, or together by humans, whose lives are irreplaceable, as well as what should be done so that everyone can attain happiness." The answers have been handed down to us today as "precepts."

It is vital that we emulate Shakyamuni Buddha while always reflecting on ourselves in light of the teachings of the Buddha. The word for "precept" was originally translated as "habit." The way of living that leads to the Buddha is to emulate one trait after another, and, rather than thinking "I must not," vow "I must" or "I shall not." "If you emulate the Buddha your entire life, you are the real thing." The late Miyazaki Zenji of the Daihonzan Eiheiji Temple often spoke of that. Receive the teachings — the "precepts" — of the Buddha, and live in the same manner. "Join the ranks." It is a precious sign of giving yourself to the Buddha's teachings.

I received a fortunate, most welcome, opportunity in September, 2012. I was given a charge by the Soto Zen School to spread the dharma in Brazil, in South America. My trip was scheduled to last about three weeks. Working out of the South America Office (Busshinji) in Sao Paulo, I drove 100 or 200 kilometers each day, and frequently traveled by plane. I sometimes gave sermons at *zazen* meetings, but for the most part I spoke to Japanese immigrants at memorial services during Ohigan, the season of the equinox. I was told that Buddhism has a history of about 100 years in Brazil. The more I learned of the people's struggles when colonization first began, the more I worried about what I should say to them. However, they welcomed me with wonderful smiles, thanking me for coming so far, and I brought glad memories home with me. "Suffering creates joy." It was a valuable opportunity to think about why they were so kind and gentle when they had gone through so many great difficulties.

Mr. Shoichi Kobayashi, trustee of Busshinji, met me at Aracatuba Airport after my two-hour flight from Sao Paulo. He drove two hours on the freeway, and one hour on a red clay road. Mr. Kobayashi is 80 years old, with a tanned, well-built physique. Ordinarily when he goes to Busshinji, he takes an overnight bus, for a roundtrip of no less than ten hours. I am humbled by his kind and sincere heart. He gave me a firm handshake with his large hand, and looked very pleased. I stayed at Mr. Kobayashi's home. Because there was no place to conduct services nearby, five families gathered that day, each bringing their ancestors' memorial tablets for a joint Ohigan (equinoctial) memorial service.

"Whether thinking about the past or the future, I don't really know what I was doing or where I was doing it, or what will happen or where it will happen. If that is so, today is the supremely best day to learn the way of Buddhism." I introduced the teaching of "Every day is a good day." At that point, Mr. Kobayashi said, "Even if you don't bring that up, that's our daily life." He then taught me that "the Portuguese greeting *bom dia* expresses the hope that today will be a wonderful day for you."

He told me that he had traveled from Japan to Brazil in 1950, a trip that took one month. It was an ocean voyage filled with hopes for life in that enormous land. Mr. Kobayashi's father told him two things when he left Japan: "Don't come back" and "Be kind to people." Even now, over sixty years later, those words never leave his mind. Contrary to his hopes, the work of clearing a dense jungle was what awaited him on his arrival. The intensely heavy labor caused many of those who were with him to flee. Coming to a land of abundant water with much anticipation, many people died of filariasis, which was spread by mosquitoes. Mr. Kobayashi commented with deep emotion that it was a mystery why he was still alive. Each time he thought he was at his end,

for some reason he remembered his father's words "Don't come back." They were a strong and sturdy support. "Be kind to people." Because of those words, he has been able to live his life without resentment toward others. "I've been given the opportunity to live this long." His words were invaluable.

"Shakyamuni Buddha attained the awakening under a Bodhi tree and taught to obey parents, priestly teachers, and the Three Treasures. Obedience and filial piety is the ultimate way. Name filial piety precept." This is from the *Brahmanet Sutra*. Learn the teachings and continuously emulate them. This is the greatest filial piety not only to the Buddha, but to all those who have led us as well. I place my hands together in prayer.

No reproduction or republication without written permission. Copyright © SOTOZEN.COM All rights reserved.