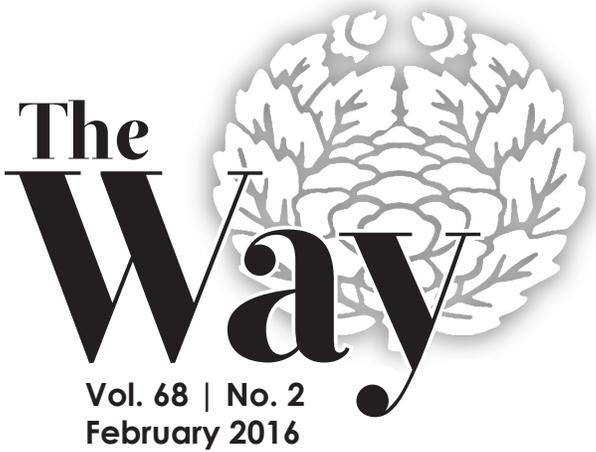


**HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE**

505 East Third Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90013  
(213) 626-4200 - FAX (213) 626-6850

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Los Angeles, CA  
Permit No. 24616



**HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE | LOS ANGELES BETSUIN**

**TEMPLE  
SCHEDULE  
FEBRUARY**

- 21 10:00am Family Service
- 28 10:00am Sunday Service  
Discussion Group

**MARCH**

- 6 10:00am Shotsuki Service
- 7 9:00am **Betsuin Golf  
Tournament**
- 13 10:00am Sunday Service
- 20 10:00am **Spring Ohigan Service**
- 20 1:00pm **Spring Seminar (E/J)**
- 27 10:00am Sunday Service  
Discussion Group

**APRIL**

- 3 10:00am Shotsuki Service
- 3 1:00pm **LABTF Hanamatsuri  
Service**
- 10 10:00am Sunday Service
- 17 10:00am **Hanamatsuri Family  
Service**

**16TH ANNUAL  
GOLF TOURNAMENT**  
VIA VERDE COUNTRY CLUB  
**MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2016**  
**9:00AM**

SUNDAY, MARCH 20TH, 2016  
**SPRING OHIGAN  
SERVICE**  
10:00AM  
**SPRING SEMINAR**  
1:00PM



# The Way



Volume 68 | Number 2 | February 2016

HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE • LOS ANGELES BETSUIN

## Buddhism and the Language of Experience

Rev. Peter Hata

A few months ago, I happened to come across an essay by Rev. Patti Usuki, the minister at Nishi's San Fernando Valley temple, entitled "What Language is Buddhism?" Her essay struck me as being quite timely as Shin Buddhist temples in America struggle with the challenge of opening their temples to an increasingly diverse Sangha. What is often at the forefront of this challenge is the issue of language—the language that most newcomers speak is English and yet in many temples, there is enough Japanese spoken (in sutra chanting and gathas for example)—and not enough everyday English—that language itself functions as a barrier for not only newcomers, but for some long-time English-speaking members as well. With this core issue of communication in mind, Rev. Usuki makes the point that, here in America, Japanese should not be considered the preferred language for Shin Buddhism.

Of course, I've always enjoyed Rev. Usuki's writing, but recently I got to know her better when I was invited to speak at her temple. I was surprised to find out that she speaks not only English and Japanese (and has taught in Japan as well), but also speaks French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and Italian. Given her multi-lingual ability, the point that she makes in her essay has more weight. She is not arguing against the primacy of the Japanese language simply because she cannot speak it.

The apparent genesis for her essay appears to have occurred some time ago. As she recalls, "When I was studying at the seminary in Kyoto, a couple of our teachers mentioned to the class that one had to understand Japanese in order to understand Jodo Shinshu. Needless to say, I was taken aback at this statement even though clearly, I had understood what was just said. If

Jodo Shinshu is a school of Buddhism, and the Buddha-dharma is true for all beings at all times everywhere, then why would one necessarily have to understand Japanese in order to understand Jodo Shinshu?" Of course, she acknowledges that sometimes we have to "borrow" foreign words when the word isn't easily translatable into English. In Shin Buddhism, frequently used words like *shinjin* and *namu amida butsu* come to mind. But Rev. Usuki also cites more common examples like the French word "rendezvous," the Persian word "bazaar," and the German word "kindergarten." Ultimately, she says, "It doesn't matter what the origin of the word is, as long as everyone understands what it means."

Of course, in regards to their use as a tool for communicating religion, all languages have their limitations. This is because in Buddhism, in order to explain for example what Amida Buddha represents, we end up using words to describe what is essentially, as she puts it, "the indescribable and the inconceivable." This is a difficult challenge in any language. Over the past year and a half, the Wednesday Night Study Class has been studying the Larger Sutra, which presents the story of Amida Buddha and the Name, *Namu Amida Butsu*. If we were just reading the sutra, we would have been done long ago. But we're trying to glimpse the deeper meaning of the words, and that the words actually point to an experience. Or that, as Shinran Shōnin might say, sincerely saying the Name *is* the experience itself.

And so, Rev. Usuki's real point, the basis of her rejecting the primacy of any language, Japanese or otherwise, is that ultimately, "Buddhism is a language of personal experience. The dharma is our guide to ultimate peace, but we each have to test it against the events of our

(Please see *LANGUAGE*, page 3)

## Sangha Voices

### 2015 Hoshidan Trip to Kyoto

Greg Elliot

My Hoshidan trip to the Honzan in Kyoto was, in many ways, eye-opening. First, I'm a homebody. I travel little. Except for a summer trip to England and Scotland when I was in college, and much later a work-related two weeks in New York City, I'd never been off the west coast of the Americas. I've gone as far north as Juneau and as far south as Rosario, Mexico, but only twice have I been farther east or west than Phoenix. So traveling to Japan was, from the beginning, an adventure.

I was part of the North American group—a rather small contingent, given that name. The five of us consisted of me and Reverend Hasegawa (our fearless leader) from the Betsuin, Jeff Davidson from Berkeley, Monic Perez from West Covina, and Elaine Siegel from Chicago.

After an overly lengthy flight—we experienced severe headwinds that put us into Tokyo well behind schedule, and had a bit of trouble all getting through customs and to the next gate, where, I'm pretty sure, the folks at ANA held the next plane just for us—we arrived in Kyoto. We compared notes—most of us had been up for more than 24 hours straight—and went to bed.

The next morning we began a tour of some of the local temples. All of them on our stops, it seemed, had something to do with Shinran Shōnin. I was surprised at how much of his life was concentrated in sites that were only a short cab ride from each other. It was a moving experience to be where Shinran sat, and to contemplate the same koi pond he did, to watch the leaves turning fall colors in the same garden he looked out on. For me, bringing the man, the legend, into such a real-life, human experience, was

(Please see *HOSHIDAN*, page 4)



# Betsuin News



## 16TH ANNUAL BETSUIN GOLF TOURNAMENT

The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Higashi Honganji Golf Tournament will be held on Monday, March 7<sup>th</sup> at the Via Verde Country Club.

The tournament will have a shotgun start at 9:00am and the fee for this year is \$145, which includes green fee, cart, range balls, prizes, and a Western BBQ buffet. The Callaway System will determine the tournament's order of finish. In addition to what the fee covers, there will be special prizes announced during lunch.

This year's proceeds will go toward our youth programs and temple maintenance. You and others you know can support us by being a tee sponsor for the tournament. Tee sponsorships are \$100 per hole; Tournament sponsorships are \$1,500 and include a foursome of golfers, Gold level sponsorships are \$500, and Silver level sponsorships are \$300. If you would like any further information about the golf tournament or being a tee sponsor, please contact the temple office.

## Spring Ohigan

This year's Spring Ohigan Service will be held on Sunday, March 20<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am. The Spring Seminar will be held the same day as our Ohigan Service at 1:00pm. We welcome you to invite your friends and family to attend both of these important events!

## Hanamatsuri Craft Fair

Calling all craft vendors! On Sunday, April 24<sup>th</sup> from 10am to 3pm, we will have our Hanamatsuri Craft Fair at the Betsuin! We are looking for vendors who make and sell craft items and would like to be a part of our Craft Fair. For more information, please contact the temple office at 213-626-4200 or email [info@hhbt-la.org](mailto:info@hhbt-la.org). Vendor applications are due in March.

## Temple Clean Up

Temple clean up is one of the most important events of the year. Members worked hard to clean the kitchen, social hall, classrooms, hondo, foyer, and outside to prepare the temple to look its best for our 2015 year-end events. Several temple members and friends came to help out at our Temple Clean up on the morning of Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. With the hard work of our many attentive and hard-working volunteers, we were able to brighten the temple and prepare it for the New Year. Thank you to everyone who helped out at our Temple Clean up!

## Joya-e Service

We ended 2015 with our annual Joya-e Service and Toshikoshi Soba. The ministers gave reflective messages about the past year and shared their challenges and accomplishments with the members in attendance. After service, everyone was invited downstairs for Toshikoshi Soba to tie us over to the New Year. We had a full house as we prepared ourselves to enjoy the delicious soba! After everyone had their share of noodles, they accompanied the ministers upstairs to take their turn at tolling the bell before midnight. Everyone who came that night enjoyed having a chance to share a fun evening on the last night of 2015.

## Shusho-e Service

The first morning of 2016, we gathered together for our Shusho-e New Year's Day Service. The ministers each shared special New Year messages to give the year a positive start. Afterward, we went downstairs to enjoy traditional Oshogatsu ozoni, otoso, and other delicious foods together after service. Everyone wore warm smiles as we greeted 2016 together.



## MOCHITSUKI

Our annual Mochitsuki is known for its sticky fingers and abundant smiles and this year was no exception. On Monday, December 28<sup>th</sup>, temple members, family, and friends came out to enjoy steaming, pounding, shaping, and eating delicious mochi. We began by preparing Okasane for the temple altar and smaller ones to decorate our home obutsudans for New Years, then we made komochi for New Years Day ozoni and an-filled mochi. Some of our more adventurous mochi-makers and shapers (and tasters!) also enjoyed making mochi in bright colors and filling them with special surprises like chocolate, peanut butter, and cookie butter! We also made mochi waffles for the first time! We helped the Lumbini children make Okasane to take home. Thank you to our mochi-making temple members who helped prepare for the event and make it fun and successful for everyone. Special thanks to Grace Yamashiro for chairing the event and Fugetsu-do for their generous an donation! We hope to see all of you (and many more) back again next year!



### SUBMISSION DEADLINE!

Submissions for *The Way* are due the 10th of each month for the following month's issue. Articles and announcements for our April Issue are due March 10th, 2016. Submissions may be subject to printing restrictions and staff approval. Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you!

(LANGUAGE, con't. from page 1)

own lives to know without any doubt that it is true." Here, she is echoing Shinran's own encouragement to experience and thus establish our deep trust in the Shinshu teachings, the "mind without doubt." And, as she says, "When we know that it is true because we have tested it, then there is no going back."

However, if Buddhism is simply about our personal experience, why is it that most of us have trouble understanding it, even when we hear it discussed in our native language? I think Rev. Usuki gets to the issue at the core of communicating the dharma when she says, "Infinite life is always there, affecting and enhancing our lives whether we're good or bad, rich or poor, Japanese or American. We can all experience these realities while being our true, authentic selves." What are our "true, authentic selves?" She clarifies this by referring to Shinran: "What speaks to us is his honest sharing of his experience as an ordinary deluded being, and his sincere gratitude and indebtedness to the experience." The "true, authentic self," as Shinran shows us, is the deeply self-aware self, the self that sees itself as it really is, as full of limitations and ignorance.

She ends her essay with a crucial message: "We have to remember that words just point us toward the settled heart. We still have to be open to deeply hearing the voice that brings us actually to walk the path—and this voice has no language but the dynamic action of infinite life in its limitless wisdom and compassion." In other words, it is not the language but understanding that the Buddhist teachings point to an experience of the dharma itself that is key. Even if Americans were to listen to the dharma in everyday English, they may not necessarily experience it; they may not "hear it." The prerequisite for beginning on the path is *deeply hearing* the teachings; this is when the path opens up for us.

Rev. Usuki's essay has important implications for American Jodo Shinshu temples. Though we must of course use language with care, it isn't language but one's real encounter with the dharma that is most important. Thus, here in America, the question becomes, how can we make accessible "the indescrib-



## First Annual Cookie Exchange

Higashi's first ever Cookie Exchange was held on Saturday, December 12, 2015. Fifteen bakers gathered in the temple kitchen to bake and share their favorite cookies. Some were "tried and true" recipes and some were "never made this before." Those whose cookies were baked first helped the others to measure and mix and drop on to the cookie sheets. There were so many delicious cookies! This will definitely have to become an annual event.



visit our website at  
[www.hhbt-la.org](http://www.hhbt-la.org)

and "like" us on facebook at  
<http://www.facebook.com/hhbt.la>

able and the inconceivable"? How do we speak "the language of experience"? Clearly, the efforts of Higashi Honganji to share Shin Buddhism in America have a much greater chance of success if they are presented in clear, conversational English. But as Usuki sensei's essay implies, there's more to it than simply "doing everything in English." We need to creatively find new, effective ways to share the teaching, or more precisely, to share the experience. Such an experience is, by definition, transformative and transcends language.

To Rev. Usuki, prioritizing Japanese as the preferred language for Shin Buddhism misses the point. The real issue

is experiencing the truth of Buddhism for oneself. In that regard, I've personally always felt that this truth, what we might say is Shinran's humble, listening spirit, the spirit of the self-aware self, is discernible in sentient beings regardless of their ethnicity, culture, and language. And, like music, this listening spirit communicates universally. Encountering a person of the "true, authentic self" is unforgettable. If I hadn't been fortunate to have met teachers who embodied this spirit, I wouldn't have become interested in studying Buddhism, regardless of language.



(HOSHIDAN, cont. from page 1)

one of the highlights of the trip.

A day later we checked into the dorms of the Honzan and got the tour. Even knowing how big the Founder's Hall is, even seeing it with my own eyes, it's hard to take in. Reportedly the largest wooden structure in the world, it would barely fit on a football field. In fact, the hall is deeper than a football field is wide by about 30 feet.



We assembled in our lecture room / sleeping rooms and met the others in our larger group: the Hawaii contingent, which was twice the size of our North American contingent; and an occasional refugee from the Brazilian contingent. The Reverend Michael Conway was our lecturer for the next three days. He did a great job.

Among the highlights of a trip at this time of year are the Hōonkō services. I'd been warned that it would be cold in Kyoto, and the first service of the day was at 6:30. Still, when volunteers hand you a blanket and a hand warmer as you exit the dorm for the Founder's Hall, it begins to sink in what folks mean when they say "cold." I was more than a bit uncomfortable in the early service, as I have trouble sitting on my knees for long, but I fared better at the later, longer Hōonkō service. One of the Hawaiians

in our party loaned me a small camp chair. The chair plus the blanket plus the hand warmer (which I put under my feet) made it much easier to ignore the cold and the discomfort and to simply marvel at the service unfolding before my eyes. That service—with the spe-

cial music, the special chanting, and the throngs of monks—was really something to behold. It's estimated that, for the main Hōonkō service, five thousand people were packed into the Founder's Hall. I was one of them.

As many of you undoubtedly know, Hoshidan means a group that gives service. The tradition of giving service to the Honzan began after WW II, and continues to this day. At some point, temple priests began giving dharma messages to those doing the work, and eventually, the service part became more ceremonial. For our group, our service was to spend a short part of one afternoon sweeping leaves in a nearby park that the Honzan manages. The park was beautiful, the work more of a chance to have fun with our group mates than an exercise, and the cleanup was finished quickly. I'm sure our leaf raking was of some help. There were, after all, 160 of us at this retreat.

We left the Honzan at the end of the three days, went back to the same hotel, and spent our last day in Kyoto shopping and visiting more temples. For me, one of the highlights of that last day was finding the statue of the Dainichi Nyorai, the Buddha of the universe. You may have been in our Betsuin the day that the Reverend Jim Fredericks told us the story of this statue, which was carved from special trees that were salvaged after the 2011 tsunami uprooted many of these trees, considered among the best to carve from. As Reverend Fredericks said, that this symbol of the life force that illuminates the universe could come from the destruction that followed the tsunami—that something beautiful and of value could be crafted from the detritus of such devastation—is, in its own way, emblematic of everything that Buddhism stands for.

We made our way back to the states and said our goodbyes, although those of us who made the trip continue to share photos with each other.

As I said, the trip was eye-opening. Something to remember. And a way for me to recall, and to practice, some of the basic tenants of Buddhism.



# SPRING SEMINAR INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

SPEAKER: REV. PETER HATA

SUNDAY, MARCH 20TH, 2016 · 1:00PM - 3:00PM



2,500 years ago, the Buddha awakened to a way of understanding life that was radically different from the prevailing views in ancient India. His teachings, having migrated through China, Japan, and now to America, are no less radical even in our advanced technological society and continue to inspire people from all walks of life to seek the same truths he awakened to. What are these eternal truths and why are we still seeking them?

This lecture will review the key early teachings of the Buddha but then trace the significant development of their expression in the centuries following the Buddha's passing, including the Shin Buddhist tradition, as well as examine some of the expressions Buddhism has found in American spirituality and popular culture.

Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple

## Hanamatsuri Craft Fair

Sunday, April 24, 2016

10:00am - 3:00pm

We're looking for vendors!

Please contact the temple office for an application!

info@hhbt-la.org • 213-626-4200

www.hhbt-la.org

### Help The Way

The Way needs your help and welcomes your contributions. With the cost of printing and postage steadily increasing, we request your support in helping to make our newsletter available in the years to come. Please consider making a donation to *The Way* to offset some of the cost. Thank you for your continued support and readership.

**Onegai-shimasu!**

### Have you heard?!

We have weekly **YOGA & ZUMBA** classes at the temple!

**YOGA | WED 6:15pm**

**ZUMBA | TUES 7:30pm**

**FRI 6:30pm**

**JOIN US!**

Help us save paper and postage by requesting your newsletter delivery ONLINE! EMAIL US at [info@hhbt-la.org](mailto:info@hhbt-la.org) and specify EMAIL ONLY for future issues of "The Way." Thank you!

# The Way



## **LUMBINI** **CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

FOR CHILDREN AGES 2 1/2 TO 5 YEARS

TEL: 213-680-2976

FAX: 213-626-6850

EMAIL: [missleslie\\_lumbini@yahoo.com](mailto:missleslie_lumbini@yahoo.com)

WEBPAGE: <http://LumbiniCDC.org>

**OPEN YEAR ROUND:**

MONDAY through FRIDAY

7:30am to 6:00pm

closed national holidays

**APPLICATIONS  
AVAILABLE!**

Call today to set up a  
visit to the school!

