

HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE

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HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE | LOS ANGELES BETSUIN

TEMPLE SCHEDULE

*Please note:
Services will be streamed
online. The temple remains
closed until further notice.*

JUNE

- 7 10:00 am Shotsuki Service
- 14 10:00 am Sunday Service
- 21 10:00 am **Father's Day/
Graduation Family
Service**
- 28 10:00 am Sunday Service

JULY

- 5 10:00 am Shotsuki Service
- 12 10:00 am Sunday Service
- 19 10:00 am **Obon Family Service
Pet Memorial Service**
- 25 TBA Virtual Obon Festival
- 26 10:00 am Hatsubon Service

join us online for our

VIRTUAL OBON

SATURDAY, JULY 25, 2020 • TIME TBA

HATSUBON SERVICE

SUNDAY, JULY 26, 2020 • 10:00 AM

details coming soon

THE TEMPLE IS CURRENTLY
CLOSED FOR THE
DURATION OF THE
COVID-19 STAY-AT-HOME
ORDERS.

FOR UPDATES, PLEASE
SUBSCRIBE TO OUR EMAIL
LIST BY VISITING OUR
WEBSITE AT

HHBT-LA.ORG

STREAM OUR
SUNDAY SERVICES
LIVE ON
FACEBOOK

FACEBOOK.COM/HHBT.LA

SUNDAYS | 10AM

OR WATCH LATER ON
FACEBOOK OR YOUTUBE

YOUTUBE SEARCH:
"HIGASHI HONGANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE"



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Memories of Ms. Mari Shimizu

Rev. Tomoyuki Hasegawa

One day in the summer of 2004, a Japanese American lady stopped by our office at the North America District to return the books she had borrowed from our library. It was soon after I was assigned to the office in July of that year. Her name was Ms. Mari Shimizu. First, I thought she was from Japan because of her fluency in Japanese, but it turned out that she was born in the United States and a longtime member of the Los Angeles Betsuin. She always apologetically said, “Sorry for my poor Japanese,” but actually her Japanese was much more refined and sophisticated than mine. I think her humble personality and deep respect for humanity were reflected in her language and they made a huge difference. She would also say, “Sorry for my poor thinking ability. I’m too old.” When we met for the first time, she was in her early eighties. But it was obvious that she had a very sharp intellect. From the first meeting, I found myself enjoying talking to her.

Whenever I gave a Dharma message at the Los Angeles Betsuin, Mari-san carefully listened to my boring talk and always thanked me for my message after the service. Then, she would give me her famous “comment” (some of you who know her might be familiar with this) such as corrections to my English usage and helpful suggestions for improving my talks. When she said good things about my talks, she always explained why she thought so not only from the standpoint of the Shin Buddhist teaching but also from the broader aspects of the American culture which I was unfamiliar with. I fully realized that my clumsy talks were not worth her praise but always appreciated her suggestions and comments because I felt the conversations with her gave

(Please see SHIMIZU, page 3)

Donating in the “New Normal”: Being in Accord with the Vow

Rev. Peter Hata

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the temple’s “new normal” consists of live-streaming Sunday services on Facebook, archiving them at YouTube, and teleconferencing on the Zoom platform. Of course, the implementation of this technology is something the temple had been “thinking about” for quite a while, probably for years, to be honest. But with the rapid spread of the virus and subsequent closure of the temple, we had to scramble to get up to speed on using these technologies in order to continue offering weekly services. Such is the power of impermanence.

There are certainly advantages that these technologies offer, and the plan is to continue live streaming even after we are able to reopen the temple. As I mentioned in my previous Way article, for a variety of reasons, some members have actually expressed a preference

for participating in our online services rather than in traditional services in the hondo. If distance or mobility is an issue for someone, then this certainly makes sense. But it’s also true that in an online service we are not able to be physically present with each other. While this is necessary during a pandemic, one example of a drawback is our inability to sing and chant together in real time. Online, we only “interact” with each other via our device’s screen. And most of us probably miss seeing and connecting with each other in person. Of course, this phenomenon—the general growth of online activities—is impacting our society as a whole; witness for example the gradual disappearance of brick and mortar shopping malls in favor of online browsing.

Interestingly, a related issue that recently arose is that, because we’re not gathering in the hondo, there’s also no longer an obvious way for participants to make donations, which of course, provide critical financial support for the temple. It was actually during one of the live-streamed services that I officiated from my home that this issue came to my attention. As I was preparing to end the live stream, I noticed a question posed by one of the participants. The question was, “What is the link to make a donation to the temple?” I had to think about it for a second or two, and then redirect them to our website, where there is a link to donate online.

As I thought about this later, I realized it was fortunate that this person asked the question of their own accord. When we hold services in the hondo, there are incense tables in front of the altar that have trays for monetary donations in plain sight, so there’s no need for the chairperson—or the minister—to

(Please see DONATING, page 3)

visit our website at
hhbt-la.org

 facebook.com/hhbt.la

 [@higashihonganji](https://www.instagram.com/higashihonganji)

 [Higashi Honganji
Buddhist Temple](https://www.youtube.com/HigashiHonganjiBuddhistTemple)

PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING
TO HIGASHI HONGANJI
BUDDHIST TEMPLE AT
HHBT-LA.ORG



Betsuin News



Lessons from the Pandemic

Rinban Noriaki Ito

Today is Memorial Day. Normally, I would be at Evergreen Cemetery in the morning to participate in a number of Memorial Day services that have been a tradition of our Japanese American community for over half a century. This year, of course, the services have been cancelled and we observe the day quietly from our homes.

We continue to be in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic but we have seen the numbers of infected and deaths go down. So many people around the country are marking this weekend as the time to get out to beaches and parks to enjoy the sun and fresh air. After having been cooped up in our homes for over two months now, we can't wait to regain our independence and to actually see our family and friends again in person rather than only on Zoom or Facetime.

However, we cannot escape the reality that people continue to die from this virus and although things are slowly returning to a certain amount of normalcy, everyday life will continue to be different perhaps until a vaccine is developed.

The reality as to how this pandemic has changed the world is unbelievable. Worldwide as of May 24, reported cases are just under 5.4 million and reported deaths are nearly 350,000. In our country, cases number 1.65 million and deaths have risen to nearly 100,000. This has happened in less than three months.

In Brazil, where we have many Higashi Honganji temples and members, the number of cases has risen to have the second most in the world.

Although I would read articles and watch the news of the painful experiences of people dying in hospitals unable to say goodbye to their families, see the bruises on the faces of doctors and nurses having to wear tight face masks for 10 or 12 hours a day working without rest
(Please see *PANDEMIC*, page 4)

COVID-19 to Social Justice

Rinban Noriaki Ito

For almost 3 months now, we have been following the safer-at-home guidelines to try to keep ourselves from being infected by the coronavirus that has spread so deeply throughout the United States and in most every country in the world. With the reopening happening throughout the States, it seems infection rates are rising again.

However, in the midst of our worries about the pandemic, we find ourselves dealing with another major issue, one of social justice. The death of George Floyd in the hands of police officers in Minneapolis brought about protests first in that city and then spread out to all major cities and other smaller cities and towns throughout the United States. It was the latest incident in which African Americans have been unduly and at times viciously treated by law enforcement.

Somehow, it seems that we are more divided than ever. There is an increased worry about another surge in coronavirus infections due to the reopening of most states throughout the country, but also now the protests and demonstrations of people joining so closely together gives rise to worry. Although the movement began out of the Black communities, and primarily with younger people, what is amazing is that those advocating for the fair treatment of African Americans at many locations are made up of demonstrators who are White, Latino, Asian, and includes people of all kinds of backgrounds and ages.

It is a political issue, and therefore one that I might hesitate to write about. But in the end, it is a social justice issue, a human rights issue, and something that we should think about from the context of the Buddhist path we are trying to follow. Relationships are something that we experience on an everyday
(Please see *JUSTICE*, page 4)

Streaming Sunday Services

The months of March, April, and May have been unlike any other at Higashi Honganji. While our doors have been closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, we have switched our services to streaming online so that our members and friends can still participate from their homes. Rinban Ito and Rev. Hata have alternated Sundays streaming from their homes or from the temple while maintaining safe distance from others. All of these services are still available to watch online on either the temple's Facebook or Youtube accounts. We also welcome you to join us live on Facebook on Sundays at 10 am if you have not already done so. As our ministers continue to learn new internet streaming skills, we have seen guest speaker appearances from Rev. Fred Brenion for a Dharma Talk and Kathy Ikeda for a Dharma School Mother's Day message. Some members and friends who live far away and would normally be unable to come to the temple on a Sunday have benefitted from our streamed services and we hope to continue them even after we are able to resume in-person services at the temple. Please join us! We look forward to seeing you (albeit virtually) for our next online Sunday Service!

Our deepest condolences

to the family and relatives of ...

Mrs. Margaret Margo Suzuki (74)
March 20, 2020

Mrs. Mitsuko Yamamoto (103)
May 9, 2020

Namu Amida Butsu

(SHIMIZU, cont. from page 1)

me the right direction in my path of the Buddhadharma.

Mari-san was not only a devout follower of Shin Buddhism but well versed in the temple members' connections with the sangha. She almost always talked to me about in what way the temple members and their relatives had contributed to the development and maintenance of the temple since the end of the war. Through hearing those stories, I began to see, though vaguely, the deep wish of the people underlying the history of the temple and that was extremely important for understanding the sangha. As the times change, the sangha may have to change its forms, but we should never forget the deep wish of the people who brought the tradition of Jōdo Shinshū to this continent and maintained it in the form of a Buddhist temple although they might not have realized exactly what their deep wish was. That's what I learned from Mari-san's stories.

Even after I began helping with the services at the Newport Beach temple, Mari-san kindly came to the temple to attend the service almost every Sunday even though it was about 40 miles away from her residence. I always looked forward to hearing her opinions after my talks. "Sorry, I made unnecessary remarks again," she would often said, but I greatly appreciated the after-service conversations with her. They became an indispensable part of my ministerial work. Since she knew very well the ins and outs of ministers' lives, I sometimes unburdened my anxieties in my life to her. She would just listen to me and not try to give me any advice, but I somehow felt secure with her entire existence. She once quietly said, "the truth will prevail." The words have lodged in my mind.

Since Mari-san was living in Boyle Heights, when I had a chance to visit the downtown area of Los Angeles, I often stopped by her house to say hello. It became part of my routine. I never forgot to bring my robe and nenju with me when I visited her because there was an Onaibutsu (a household altar) in her living room. She always asked me to hold a small service before I left.

I usually chanted the Shōshinge and wasans in a traditional style together with her. I sometimes chanted sutras. Her life was always centered around the Buddhadharma. Even though the path of Buddhadharma is broad and open to anyone, it is also extremely easy to lose sight of it because of my own self-centered blind desires deeply rooted in my self-consciousness. Actually, my mind constantly got off the track. But every time I saw Mari-san, her existence reminded me of the fact that there was the path I should return to. From there I was able to start walking the path again. To me, she was the embodiment of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Our temples and ministers have been supported and nurtured by seekers like her.

One day in the summer of 2015, I was informed of her passing. She was ninety-three years old. That was what I had been afraid of and tried hard not to think about. Even though I always talked about the impermanent nature of our lives as a Buddhist minister, I was afraid of accepting the impermanent nature of her life. I know it's ridiculous. It was so scary that I felt like I was setting out for uncharted waters. But I also feel like she might be laughing at me, saying something like, "Don't take it so seriously, sensei. It's just a life. Just believe in what you're doing." When I remember her, I feel like I can start walking the path again. And Mari-san in my memory never forgets to say, "Sorry, I'm being intrusive again."



(DONATING, cont. from page 1)

suggest a donation be made. That might be a little awkward.

But of course, the more important issue here is not so much the question of how to "expedite" donations online, but rather, what the donations themselves really represent and what prompts us to make them. There's a famous passage in the *Tannisho* where Shinran Shonin sheds light on this question:

Furthermore, although offerings can be part of the practice of selfless giving, no matter how many valuables we present to the Buddha or give to our teachers, the act

is meaningless if true entrusting is absent. If one is made to give the self up to Other Power and true entrusting is complete, even though one does not present even a single sheet of paper or even half a coin to the Buddha Dharma, he or she is in accord with the intention of the Primal Vow.
-The *Tannisho*, Taitetsu Unno translation

As you may know, the Primal Vow is the vow made by Amida Buddha to bring all beings to enlightenment. And in this regard, Shinran is emphasizing that we should not think of our offerings as any kind of merit-building, or look upon Amida as an object of worship. Instead, because Shinran conceived of Amida as representing ultimate truth-reality itself—the interconnectedness and oneness of all life—all that's necessary is just to entrust ourselves to this truth. This truth-reality is constantly working in our lives. But we have to truly hear and receive it. When we do, our offerings reflect the working of the Vow within us.

Shinran's conception of Amida may sound rather abstract, but actually, I think that a very down-to-earth example of how this works occurred in the very service I'm referring to. The same person who had asked about how to make a donation to the temple had also commented, "Thank you so much. This is exactly what our family needed this morning." As I recall, my message that day had been about the interconnectedness of all life, and so the impetus for making a donation seems to have arisen naturally out of having received this precious teaching of the Buddha, and then, simply responding in gratitude. I should also clarify that the object of gratitude was certainly not me: *both* this person and myself were moved by the same teaching.

I think this is an example of "being in accord with the intention of the Primal Vow"; it's an appreciation that arises within us when we hear the Buddha's teaching, when we realize we are not living separate, disconnected lives, but are in fact, part of something bigger than ourselves. In every moment, we are sustained by countless causes and conditions that make our lives possible. Our true entrusting in this truth

(Please see **DONATING**, page 4)

(DONATING, cont. from page 3)

naturally leads to the selfless giving that Shinran mentions.

And ultimately, truly entrusting in the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha-Dharma is something we can do, not only during our services—whether online or in the hondo—but actually anytime and anywhere. In this sense, the Buddha’s teaching can guide us to living each moment of our lives in accord with the Primal Vow.



(PANDEMIC, cont. from page 2)

to save as many patients as possible. But the nationwide numbers climbing exponentially everyday seemed on the one hand incredible, but on the other hand merely numbers not related to actual people.

The front page of yesterday’s New York Times, normally with many headlines, photos and articles, was filled from top to bottom with words. Listed were 1,000 names taken from the list of nearly 100,000 people who had died of COVID-19 in our country. The names were taken from obituary listings of hundreds of newspapers throughout the country. With the names were one or two lines to describe their lives. I have to admit that although the stories shared on TV news were moving, the reports on new infections and deaths were simply numbers. So that front page of the New York Times showed us that each one of those who died were family members and friends who were loved and whose lives were ended prematurely due to the virus.

I scrolled up and down the page to see the names and to find out a little about them. There was Marie, age 67, a Navajo teacher with a sense of duty, Annie, age 100, who was a champion of speech disorders, Genowefa, 98, who survived the German invasion of Poland during World War II, Mildred, 92, who was a Sunday School teacher, Roland, 88, a priest who sought to help people be happy and holy, Juanita, 90, who was a champion for the rights of Hispanic women, Mary Ellen, 80, who was amazing in every sense of the word, Motoko, 92, who was the last living woman member of the W.W. II Monu-

ments team, Kenneth, 94, who could spit a watermelon seed halfway across a double lot (?), Latasha, 33, who was always the first to offer help to those in need, Gerald, 86, who was the founder of PBS, Norman, 91, who loved seeing the full moon rise over the ocean, Donald, 86, who was the brother of Elizabeth Warren, Donald, 88, former president of Stanford University, Raymond, 46, a sanitation worker living his fullest days, Lila, 87, who was the first black woman to graduate from Harvard Law School, and there was Stuart, 73, a Brooklyn cabbie who found a home in Buddhism.

Some were listed as being wonderful mothers, fathers, or grandparents, dependable friends and so forth. But the list above were names of people who were normal people living extraordinary lives. Unfortunately, the coronavirus ended their lives prematurely.

It was about a month ago that we were seeing the horrific scenes of hospitals in New York. Those scenes were lessons we were receiving in real time. On April 7, the number of deaths in that State totaled 1,055 people. Fortunately, that number is down to less than a hundred on May 23. But in learning about even a handful of those who died, we see that each was a precious life, a life with loving families and friends, persons making contributions to the world.

Years ago, a student in our Buddhist meditation group at Occidental College was studying Greek history. We’ve all heard about Greek tragedies written by such playwrights as Sophocles who is best known for writing Oedipus Rex. It is the tragedy in which the main character, King Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother.

These tragedies were performed on stage at the town square and all of the citizens were obligated to see these plays. The reason why was by watching such tragedies on stage, the people would become more compassionate towards each other.

In our own Shin Buddhist tradition, we have the Meditation Sutra which tells the story of a prince named Ajatasatru who kills his father and imprisons his mother in order to usurp the throne. The other main character is Devadatta, a cousin of the Buddha who convinces

Ajatasatru to take over the palace while he himself was plotting to take over the Sakyamuni Buddha’s Sangha. Shinran Shonin shared the story of this sutra through his writings. His self-reflection made him identify with the perpetrators of the story. In the same way that Greek tragedies were able to make the people of its time to become more compassionate towards others, the Meditation sutra did the same.

The stories we have heard over the past few months are also valuable learning experiences. We do have the tendency to think about the nearly 100,000 lives that have been lost as a number. Through the lessons of the New York Times and the lessons of ancient wisdom, we realize how important it is to reflect on the important lessons of interconnectedness, impermanence, and the intrinsic value of life. Our immediate reaction is am I all right, are my family and friends all right. Our tradition teaches us to regard all life in the same way, with compassion. Through hardship we have the opportunity to grow as human beings.



(JUSTICE, cont. from page 2)

basis. Lately, the catch phrase has been “Alone Together” which is reminding us that we should stay at home as much as possible, but also realize that we are in this all together. The question we are asked is, how do we relate to each other? With fear and suspicion, or do we relate to each other as friends, as part of the larger family.

Our tendency is to always try to protect ourselves, to care about our own welfare and that of our family, our friends. We find it so difficult to feel that way about everyone, about total strangers. The demonstrations of all kinds of people joining together to try to bring about real change, justice for all people, is a wonderful example of people shedding their differences and working towards a shared goal together.

Basketball legend, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, wrote a wonderful article in the L.A. Times entitled “Don’t understand the protests? What you’re seeing is people pushed to the edge.” Probably the most well quoted portion is this

(Please see JUSTICE, page 5)

(JUSTICE, con't. from page 4)

passage: "Racism in America is like dust in the air. It seems invisible — even if you're choking on it — until you let the sun in. Then you see it's everywhere. As long as we keep shining that light, we have a chance of cleaning it wherever it lands. But we have to stay vigilant, because it's always still in the air."

From a Buddhist perspective, what he is saying is that we cannot see truth unless it is illuminated by the light of wisdom. This is a central part of our teaching. Without that light, we will continue on living self-centered lives thinking mostly about ourselves and our circle of family and friends. What the death of George Floyd and the ensuing gatherings of young people joining together to support each other is teaching us is precisely the importance of seeing truth through the light that shines upon us.



SAVE THE DATE

VIRTUAL OBON

SATURDAY, JULY 25, 2020 • TIME TBA

JOIN US FOR A CELEBRATION ONLINE

HATSUBON SERVICE

SUNDAY, JULY 26, 2020 • 10:00 AM

details coming soon

