

DHARMA MESSAGE

What is Your Path?

By Reverend William Briones

There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth ... not going all the way and not starting.

Since being assigned to Nishi Betsuin, I've welcomed many students to our temple wanting to learn more about Buddhism. Granted, many of the students come as part of a school trip, school project or even a class assignment, none the less they always come with questions. Just last month, an 8th grade class from an all girl's Christian school came to visit our temple. They all had note pads and as soon as I finished my brief twenty minute talk on Buddhism, they bombarded me with questions. I was so impressed with many of their questions. One particular question a young girl posed was, "So, what is your path?" I responded "What is my path?" "ahhhhh ... what is my path?"

What is my path? Was this a rhetorical question?

Obviously to be on a path is to be on a journey to somewhere. There is a destination. We all have some destination; we all have some goal in life.

What is *your* path? Is it to find the truth? How to make money? How to be happy? How to find peace? How to be successful? How to be powerful? How to be to powerful? To find the truth?

For young kids ... study, get good grades, graduate from high school and get into a good college ... get an education ... get a job ... make money ... get married ... have 1.3 children. For us older folks, most likely we want to retire healthy with a nice retirement and medical plan. Watch our grandchildren grow up.

But you know as simple as that may sound that may not be the path for everyone.

Every Friday, I take Nobuko to the Flower Market on 7th between Wall and Maple. The homeless that line the street ... what is their path? Their path is not an optimistic path for the future. For many the path is to find the next meal, where will the sleep for the evening. It's a gloomy and depressing sight. What is their path?

Yet at the opposite side of the social spectrum, we read or see on the television of the rich, the wealthy living a very shallow and empty life. What is their path? Make more money? More possessions?

There comes a point in our life, whether rich or poor, old or young, sick or healthy that we are confronted with truth reality of life and we begin our journey. Call it a spiritual journey, the road to truth what ever... It is a journey associated with our private realm of thought and personal experience.

Our journey begins when ever we struggle with the issues of how our lives fit into the greater cosmic scheme of things. We begin our journey when we wonder where the Universe comes from, why we are here, or what happens to us when we die. Our journey may begin when we are moved by beauty, love, nature, art ... the birth of child ... the death of a loved one.

However, being on the path goes beyond being the kind of person who appreciates a sunset, feels good about themselves. The question is, if you are on a journey, how does that actually influence or change the way you live your life?

How many of us make the Buddhist Teachings an essential part of our everyday lives, not just something we compartmentalize on Sunday or when someone dies.

To come to the temple and be in the company of Dharma friends and sharing their fellowship is a wonderful experience. But we shouldn't forget the importance of our spiritual growth and understanding of the Nembutsu. And though our fundraising and temple activities are a very important aspect of temple survival, we shouldn't forget the most important aspect of our life.

Our religious life is something on which we base our life by. It is not just an opinion or some facts, our religious life is inseparable from our existence. Our thoughts, words and actions are manifestations of our religious conviction. There is no separation between faith and life.

In today's hectic life we tend to compartmentalize our lives. We associate religion to Sunday service or funerals. We often compromise our religious beliefs to fit our needs. However, in the truly religious person, religion is what one is at every moment of ones life and in every relationship. It is the spirit and quality of that life.

The Nembutsu is that foundation that truly integrates our lives. It is the fulfillment of the deepest of human aspirations, allowing us to fully live each and every breath of life in appreciation and gratitude. To savor each moment, and to experience all that exists in and around us is Namo Amida Butsu.

What is your path? Each one of us is unique, Buddhist recognize that everyone has different abilities, interests, backgrounds. That's why in Buddhism we say "There are 84,000 Dharma paths".

Namo Amida Butsu