



# *Guiding Light*

May 2020

**SPECIAL EDITION**

**COMING TOGETHER DURING COVID-19**



**TORONTO BUDDHIST CHURCH**  
*a Jodo Shinshu Temple*

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## LET'S MAKE THE TOUGH TIMES BETTER

Years 2019 and 2020 will probably be the toughest years many of us will have ever experienced. COVID19! Whoever would have thought that a virus could shut down the world and wreak havoc on the well being of everyone you know: extreme respiratory illness, deaths, lack of equipment and supplies, shutdown of industries causing unemployment and lack of funds for the bare essentials. Governments are digging deep for funding rescues for the industries and individuals who this virus has affected, unbelievable. And would we ever have dreamt that the phrases 'wash your hands often, don't touch your face and stay home' would become a large part of our lives.

We are putting out these special editions of our newsletter to help give those who will read this newsletter a sense of hope and share what is helping them cope. It is also a way for us to reach out to our TBC members, to show that everything is not all gloom and doom and to show there are bright things happening in peoples lives by bringing you pictures of how families are coping or uplifting passages that are helping our members and their families. It will be a place to publish reflections of how the Dharma is helping. We are asking all members of the Buddhist Temples of Canada and their congregation who may be reading the newsletter to contribute and share their experiences for future editions.

This is our first edition, we are hoping that you will share your thoughts and that we will receive enough material to publish monthly until we are able to resume our 'normal' lives. Please pass on the newsletter to anyone you feel will enjoy a bit of brightness. The newsletter will also be posted on the Toronto Buddhist Church website [tbc.on.ca](http://tbc.on.ca) under '**Guiding Light Newsletter**'.

Any suggestions to improve the newsletter are welcome. Please send your articles and suggestions to [darlene.rieger28@gmail.com](mailto:darlene.rieger28@gmail.com). Articles should be in word format. Please send pictures for your article separately.

## LET'S START THIS READ OFF WITH SOMETHING FAMILIAR AND FUN

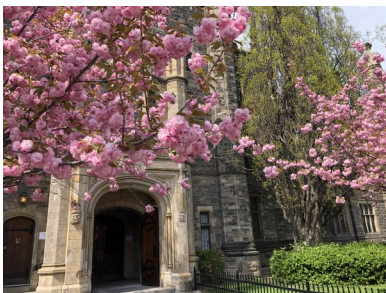
**A RENDITION OF THE SONG 'SUKIYAKI'. COPY AND PASTE OR TYPE THE LINK BELOW INTO THE ADDRESS BAR OF YOUR BROWSER.**

**IT WILL BRING A SMILE TO YOUR FACE AND MAYBE EVEN MAKE YOU SING!**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1N8okX4gZ4>

## SPRING HAS SPRUNG!

UNFORTUNATELY WE CAN'T BE THERE RIGHT NOW BUT I HOPE THESE IMAGES SENT IN BY AN ISSHIN MEMBER, IZUMI SAKAMOTO AND HER SISTER KAORU WILL BRING YOU SOME JOY



University of Toronto



Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre



Musashi-Kyuryo Nat'l Gov. Park

“It is saddening that so many people, both young and old, men and women, have died this year and last. But the Tathagata taught the truth of life’s impermanence for us fully, so you must not be distressed by it.



I, for my own part, attach no significance to the condition, good or bad, of persons in their final moment. People in whom shinjin is determined do not doubt, and so abide among the truly settled. For this reason their end also—even for those ignorant and foolish and lacking in wisdom—is a happy one.

You have been explaining to people that one attains birth through the Tathagata’s working; it is in no way otherwise. What I have been saying to all of you for many years past has not changed. Simply achieve your birth, firmly avoiding all scholarly debate. I recall hearing the late Master Honen say, “Persons of the Pure Land tradition attain birth in the Pure Land by becoming their foolish selves.” Moreover, I remember him smile and say, as he watched humble people of no intellectual pretensions coming to visit him, “Without doubt their birth is settled.” And I heard him say after a visit by a man brilliant in letters and debating. “I really wonder about his birth.” To this day these things come to mind.

Each of you should attain your birth without being misled by people and without faltering in shinjin. However, the practitioner in whom shinjin has not become settled will continue to drift, even without being misled by anyone, for he does not abide among the truly settled.”

Respectfully, Bun’o (1260), 11th month 13th day

*Letter from Zenshin to Joshin-bo*

*This is a letter written by Shinran (pen name Zenshin) at a time of famine and an epidemic. It is Letter 6 from Lamp for the Latter Ages.*

*Submitted by Pauline Knude,*

*Member of the Toronto Buddhist Church*

For all the workers in the world who are putting their jobs first and their lives second during the Covid 19 pandemic. WE ALL THANK YOU!

*The ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in a moment of comfort and convenience but where they stand in times of challenge and controversy.*

*Dr. Martin Luther King (1929-1968)*

*From Dana’s “Way of Life”*

### *June’s Morning Smile!*

*Bougainvillea, Amaryllis, Begonia, Oxalis*



*June Asano, Member, Toronto Buddhist Church*

*A gate in the garden that surrounds Kinkaku-ji  
(Golden Pavilion)*



*Photographer Isshin Daiko Member Sandy Usami*

## Lean on Me!



Under these trying times of the Coronavirus, pain and agony through isolation and separation from family and friends, anxieties and fear of the unknown of this global pandemic have become a common experience for many of us, if not all. There are those who have conveyed their empathy for others who have contacted this dread disease and sadness for those who have died from Covid 19; there are the essential workers and caregivers who have committed themselves to provide for the well-being of others. And, as we reflect on this novel virus and the dreaded disease, questions abound. What is the cause of this - is it Circumstantial or Karmic? When will this ever end? Will we ever experience such a situation again in our lifetime? Will there be enough to sustain us? What about the education of our children? The list goes on and on.

This life of mine had undergone a previous traumatic experience of the WW II Japanese displacement from the Westcoast to Southern Alberta. At the age of six having been separated from my family because of the lack of accommodation in the farmer's house, I was placed in my grandparent's home on the arrival in Lethbridge. I found it difficult to accept despite the fact they were my loving grandparents. I find this present situation equally devastating. Will there be similar experiences? Who is to know? How true it is!

Like many of you I have had this new experience of having to be two metres from my grandson when speaking to him, queueing-up a similar distance behind the next shopper at the local store and self-isolating myself in my home. How do I fill this void? How do I fill this time? While trying to find the answers, I recalled **the Homages**, the passage that we repeat at our services. The first line reads, *"Hard it is to be born into human life; now we are living it."* For us humans bounded with self-inflicted tendencies, we are indeed living in that moment. We are living it now.

Of the present, there is a Japanese phrase that expresses my feelings. It is *"Shikata ga nai or Shou ga nai"*. This is how it is. How true it is! We are living it.

However, in accepting this feeling, I still look for means to relieve the agony of not being able to be with my loved ones? Seeking comfort, I began to look for an outlet, perhaps to escape (not from a literal sense) and to find purposeful diversions. And, with the passing of time while reading the newspaper and listening to commentaries on TV, I heard about the death of Bill Withers, an African American musician and band leader who wrote the song **"Lean on Me"**. I had heard his song many times over and it struck a bell with me. I'd like to share the first four verses (in entirety, there are eight verses) with you:

*Sometimes in our lives we all have pain, we all have sorrow  
But if we are wise, we know that there's always tomorrow.  
Lean on me, when you're not strong and I'll be your friend  
I'll help you carry on for it won't be long, til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on.  
Please swallow your pride if I have things you need to borrow  
For no one can fill those of your needs that you won't let show.  
You just call on me brother when you need a hand, we all need someone to lean on  
I just might have a problem that you'll understand we all need someone to lean on."*

*Continued on page 5*



## The Joy of Chanting

By Dennis Madokoro

“Chant the Dharma like a Lion’s Roar, because...You only get out of Life what you put into it.”

In these self-isolating days of Covid 19, we need to chant like a Lion’s roar.



So, like me, you had been listening to the chanting in the days when we went to service and wondering “Wow, when will it end, or I wish I knew what they meant.”

For me, a turnaround came at the Pre-Tokudo session in Vancouver January 2012. There, six Tokudo aspirants chanted Shoshinge and each of us did one Wasan.

For me, it was Wasan number 3. It starts “Ge da tsu-no.....” I love the sound and melody of this Wasan.

When you are the solo voice in front of two congregations, Fraser Valley and Vancouver, you are totally exposed. I was totally mesmerized by this Wasan, its beautiful sound and poetry.

These words from an article by Doreen Hamilton Sensei captured my delight.

“By chanting, you tap into the collective consciousness of all the others who have done the same chant before you, bringing you a little closer to the divine or enlightenment”.

Gassho,

Dennis Madokoro, TBC Minister Assistant

二度とない人生だから つゆぐさのつゆにも

めぐりあいのふしぎを思い 足をとどめてみつめてゆこう



**Nido to nai jinsei dakara**

**tsuyugusa no tsuyunimo**

**Meguriai no fushigi wo omoi**

**ashi wo todomete mitsumete  
yukou**

**Because life cannot be lived over again**

**Even in the dew drop of a blade of grass**

**I marvel at the wonders that bring it about**

**Stop and appreciate the wonders of life.**

Poem written by the Buddhist Poet Shinmin Sakamura (1909 – 2006)

In this poem, Sakamura is expressing how even the dew drop on a blade of grass comes about because of many causes and conditions. This is the wonder of life. So we should try to stop and appreciate even such seemingly insignificant events.

*Poem submitted by Reverend Grant Ikuta*

## Lean on Me!, Continued from page 4

His words are about love, about loneliness, about sadness and about being steadfast-all the emotions that surround me. His words touched my heart. I felt there was deep authenticity.

And, again as I reflected, I thought to myself-these words are the 21st century expressions of the thoughts of **Shakyamuni Buddha** as he sat under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, India on reaching enlightenment 2,600 years ago.

Yes, indeed, there is one that I can Lean On. It is the **Calling Voice of the Buddha** stating “take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

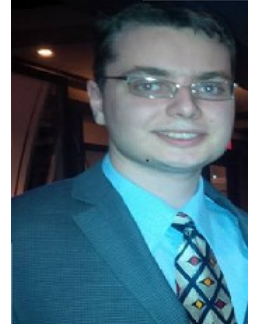
I feel his Voice is ever present as expressed through the Nembutsu, calling on me to come just as I am. My head bowed in Gratefulness and Humbleness as I repeated Namo Amida Butsu, over and over and over.

In Gassho, Roy Akune, Tokudo, Steveston Buddhist Temple

## Deepening My Practice During These Troubled Times

By Alex Badila

Member, Toronto Buddhist Church



COVID-19 was a huge blow to many people's lives, and mine was no exception. As the things I went out to enjoy began to close around me, I became depressed and angry. No more Tai Chi, salsa, temple, karate, hanging out with friends, and then almost no going out at all. The ingredients were all there for me to go into a depressive spiral.

But I refused to do so. I set up a schedule for myself every day and stuck to it as best I could. I found many things to do, a large part of them either religious or spiritual. I kept up with my daily meditation and started rereading Thich Nhat Hanh's book *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, reading only one chapter a day to really have time to absorb it.

Those things are great, but they will not be the focus of my article. We are here to talk about Shin Buddhism specifically, so that is what I will do now.

I kept up my morning practice of offering a piece of fruit to my butsudan, saying the Nembutsu, as well my morning gratitude, and chanting Juseige. That really helped to jump start my morning. However, I did not leave it at that. I decided to deepen my practice further.

First, I deepened my practice intellectually. I took a number of online courses on Everyday Buddhist about Shin Buddhism. I highly recommend that website, because I learned a lot through it. I also ordered a copy of *The Three Pure Land Sutras* to get at the heart of Shin Buddhist writing.

Now that is all well and good, but it's not enough to just have an intellectual grasp of Shin Buddhism. You have to really *feel* it. It has to touch your heart. That is why I also deepened my practice through... well, actual practice!

I decided that, since I had the extra time, I would try to chant Shoshinge every day, since that is the heart of the Shin Buddhist teachings. I was able to keep up with it for quite a few weeks. I found a video online from Midwest Buddhist Temple of a minister chanting Shoshinge Sofu, as well as the six Wasans, and followed along with it. I chose Sofu because it is the most commonly chanted one, since it is not the one reserved for special occasions. It was just my luck that the week before the temple had closed down, I had been able to borrow the service book. Chanting with the book helped me keep up with the melody of the chant. It was an invaluable resource.

Chanting Shoshinge every day helped me really internalize the teachings. It helped me feel them deep down. I felt the calm and ease that they brought, as well as the feeling of interconnectedness, since it felt like my voice was coming out of multiple mouths. It gave me strength and confidence in myself as I chanted with a lion's roar. I was in awe at the power it brought. Maybe that was the feeling of the Other Power of Amida. I truly hope so.

Unfortunately, as things became busier with interviews and learning new things for a career I want to pursue, I was unable to keep chanting Shoshinge every day, so I started saving it for one day during the weekend. This way I am still able to deepen my practice every week.

The last thing I would like to talk about is gratitude. Having so many things taken away from me helped me be grateful for having them in the first place. It also got me to be grateful for the things I still have: the roof over my head, my supportive parents, and the delicious food my mom makes, among many others. Gratitude is a powerful weapon against depression and despair, and is at the heart of the Shin Buddhist teachings.

That is how I've been using Shin Buddhism to deal with my current situation. This religion has been a great help to me during these troubled times. I hope it has been the same for you.

## NEWS FROM TBC RELIGIOUS DIRECTORS

Hello everyone! It's already been more than a month since the temple has been closed. Hopefully you and your isolation mates are coping well with the current state of the pandemic affecting the world. It is a scary, overwhelming and isolating time for many people; compounded by the closure of many facilities including Toronto Buddhist Church. Even though the church is closed, please reach out to someone you know, or leave a message on the church voice mail if you need some assistance. (416) 534-4302. Our voice mail is checked several times a day. We do not want you to feel abandoned at this difficult time.

The Board of Directors met through Zoom and concluded that that church would remain closed and services will be cancelled at least until **September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020**. While this decision was difficult in many ways, foremost in our thoughts was the health and safety of the congregation. We are hoping to restart our services on **Rally Sunday / September Shotsuki-Memorial Service** on September 13, 2020. Please continue to check our TBC website <http://tbc.on.ca/> and our Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/groups/torontobuddhisttemple/> to find updated information.

**Please let your family and friends know about the temple's cancellations including the Obon celebrations and services. Sadly, this means all the Obon weekend events including cemetery visitations, Obon Odori, Hatsubon service and both the English and Japanese Obon services are all cancelled for 2020.**

While we are not physically able to meet at the temple, we have the opportunity to watch or join other religious services conducted by JSBTC ministers, online. Calgary, Southern Alberta, Steveston and Vancouver have all shared video links to their live or taped services. Please check the website and/or facebook to find the links. We will try to post them in a timely manner. Reverend Grant Ikuta is conducting regular Sunday services at 1:00 pm (eastern time) via Zoom. Please email him at [grant.ikuta@gmail.com](mailto:grant.ikuta@gmail.com) to get on the invitation list. You can see many people from across the country and he will give you an opportunity to talk to each other after his very timely Dharma message.

Reverend Ouchi is still waiting for permission to work from Immigration Canada, but Bishop Aoki and Rev. Grant Ikuta are available to provide makuragyo, funeral services and memorial services over the internet through Skype, Facetime, or Zoom. Please contact either the temple or Paul Aoki directly.

Finally, thank you to Darlene Rieger who has offered to publish and distribute this newsletter over the course of this pandemic closure, Denise Crofton and Maria Bazilevskaya for keeping the website updated and Eric Mark for updating our Facebook page.

We will all get through this pandemic. This is yet another, albeit big, change that we are experiencing and as Reverend Ikuta said in his last Dharma Talk, we have another opportunity to express our gratitude for what we have in this country. The sacrifices that we make today will give us the opportunity to meet again in the future.

Wishing you good health and looking forward to seeing you again in September.

In Gassho,

Paul Aoki and Donna Nakano



### Please Don't Forget About Us

Even though the church is closed, we still have many ongoing expenses to pay in order to keep the church going. If you are able, please continue with your donations.

Canada Post has discontinued delivering the mail until churches are given clearance to open. All current mailed donations and memberships fees will be processed once Canada Post resumes delivery service. We are not allowed to pick up our mail so please use PayPal for all membership fees and donations during the pandemic. <http://tbc.on.ca/about-us/donate/> or <http://tbc.on.ca/jodo-shinshu-buddhism/membership/>

One of the early books I read on Buddhism is by Gyomay M. Kubose called *The Center Within*. I would say it is one of my favourite books.

It is a small book only 126 pages, and is very easy to read and understand. Each chapter is based on a dharma talk Gyomay Kubose has given over a period of time. Each dharma talk touches on situations we can relate to, and helps readers find their own 'center and gives examples of how to live a fulfilling and meaningful life.'



One of the insights I took from his book is an understanding that everyone is different or unique, and we should embrace our uniqueness and develop it to its full potential. In order to do this one must 'look within and find oneself and be oneself.'

One of my favourite dharma talks is titled *Laughter*. I thought during this time of uncertainty, fear, sadness and anxiety it would help ease the different feelings we are all experiencing and bring a sense of lightness to our life.

### ***Laughter by Gyomay Kubose***

*Buddhism teaches us how to laugh about life. Laughter is the basis of a healthy life. This laughter is hearty, total, and from the abdomen. To smile is easy. It is only the surface of life – above the neck. But to laugh! I remember the editor of one of the religious newspapers in Japan. This man really could laugh. If you had a problem, you didn't need counseling or advice. Just being with him and hearing him laugh dissolved the whole problem. Where did this healthy laugh come from? It came from a true understanding of life.*

*This laughter is not laughter for fun. The laughter that Buddhism points to is larger in scope and deeper in dimension. People who become tense, melancholy, and have nervous breakdowns – they cannot laugh. They are so involved in 'serious' things. But the reality of life is impermanence. The Buddha taught that life is continuous change. Everything does change, good things, bad things, pleasant things and unpleasant things – all are constantly flowing. All things are in the great current of life, and here is a little person trying to keep something and attach himself to something, thus creating misery. When one sees how small he is, what a fool he is, a little person trying to stem the whole tide of the universe – he then is able to laugh.*

*Let's learn to laugh. We are too serious about little things. We forget the larger perspective. We become attached to things – a particular business, a particular person. We worry so much about it. We are quite foolish beings. Attached to non-attachable things. Even when we understand non-attachment, we become attached to the idea of non-attachment. By depending upon the undependable things we create our own problems. They seem big and we become frustrated. If we can laugh at our little mistakes and then extend that and laugh at our own basic ignorance – a big laugh, then this makes for a healthy life.*

I like this story because it is a reminder about impermanence. We often get caught up in our daily lives, and when things go wrong we don't automatically say 'don't worry this will pass, nothing stays the same.' At times like this we all need to add perspective to our lives, and an understanding that during these uncertain times, things will change. If we can find the laughter or lightness from our current situation we can reduce our suffering and live a much happier life.

Gassho,

Denise Crofton, Member, Toronto Buddhist Church



*Time will be healer regardless of the depth of the wound  
Like the ripening of a persimmon the memories of sorrow will turn  
sweet with time*

*From Kaikiyoshi Seiten*