

JSBTC Day Message



As the leaves on the trees turn to the shades of fall, temples across Canada commemorate the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples of Canada Day (JSBTC Day) to honor the rich heritage of our organization, spanning over 105 years. It was on October 12th, 1905 that Rev. Senju and his wife Tomie Sasaki arrived from Japan to Vancouver as the first minister appointed by the mother temple Nishi Hongwanji to serve as the first overseas minister in Canada. Rev. Sasaki was sent by the Hongwanji as the result of many requests from Japanese immigrants who had settled in the Lower Mainland B.C. area at the turn of the 20th Century. Since then, we have witnessed both tremendous growth as well as decline in our organization. Presently, there are twelve temples across the country with a membership of just around 1,700 people. Recent decline in the membership numbers are an ongoing concern for all of us.

In considering about our membership, what we are really concerned with is our own existence. Such concerns are not new, and in fact there is a famous story in the Cūla-mālunkya Pali Sutta known as the “Poison Arrow Parable”. It is said that one day, during his meditation practice, the disciple Malunkya-putta began pondering on very broad ranging questions such as, “Is the world eternal or not? Is the world finite or not? Is the body one with or different from the spirit? Do people exist after death or not?” Such questions began to race through Malunkya-putta’s mind. He was determined to find the answers and approached the Buddha demanding that he answer these questions or he would leave the Sangha. As his reply the Buddha told the parable of the poisoned arrow. He said, “suppose there is a man who has just been shot by a poisoned arrow. Family and friends bring a doctor to remove the arrow. However, what would happen if the wounded man told the doctor, “before you pull out the arrow I need to know, the gender of the archer, the caste, the countenance, and the place he/she is from”. Suppose the man continued, “moreover, I need to know whether the bow was a big bow or a small bow, whether the bowstring was a wisteria vine, a string or a tendon, whether the shaft was made of cane or bulrush, whether the feathers were from an eagle, a heron, a hawk, or a peacock. Whether the shaft was bound with cow sinew, water buffalo muscle, deer sinew, or grass and whether the arrowhead was horseshoe shaped, spear shaped, a tooth of a calf, or the feather of a bird. The man would be dead before they could remove the arrow”. This parable is telling us that we should not waste time in idly thinking on questions which are in fact so great that we

could not hope to fathom with our limited capacity to understand. More importantly, we should look to our immediate present and realize that all existence is dependent on now.

When we apply this parable to the future of our existence as an organization, our actions today will make a difference for tomorrow. It is up to each and every one of us to define within ourselves how we can live each moment consciously realizing that by doing so we will be taking incremental steps in working to find solutions on how to strengthen JSBTC.

Reflecting on the events that have transpired over this past year, I think you will all agree that with natural disasters such as the Earthquake, Tsunami, and resulting nuclear disaster in Japan in March, or the ongoing world financial crisis, 2011 has been a year of great turmoil. In such a world, it is truly difficult to find a place that promotes peace, harmony, and compassion. The temple is just such a place, a sanctuary where we can find peace of mind and calmness through the Buddha Dharma. On a larger scale, the JSBTC exists to assist in the coordination of all the temples across Canada.

May I ask you on this JSBTC Day to reflect on what part you play in this great legacy of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Canada and may I also ask you to continue supporting both your local temple as well as our National Organization.

Gassho,

Grant Ikuta, Bishop
Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples of Canada