



HONPA HONGWANJI MISSION OF HAWAII

STATE HEADQUARTERS

1727 PALI HIGHWAY, HONOLULU, HI 96813

PH: (808) 522-9200 ■ FAX: (808) 522-9209 ■ WEB: <http://hongwanjihawaii.com>

Bishop Eric Matsumoto was invited by Dr. George Tanabe to participate in a panel discussion at the 2016 Hawaii Book and Music Festival held on May 1, 2016. Here are his remarks.

Japanese Buddhist Adaptations for the Future

Buddhism, with its close to 2600 year history, including our Jodo Shinshu stream of Mahayana Pure Land Buddhism, of close to 800 years, has a rich tradition. The Universal Truths of Enlightenment and Wisdom and Compassion do not change over time, but how to express and convey may vary depending on conditions and circumstances as well as the modes or venues with which to share.

I believe every long-lasting organization, in order to remain relevant, decides to make significant changes during certain junctures of its history. Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii is at just such a time. Hence, we are looking at ourselves and trying to strike a balance between traditions from our past and new practices and customs which would resonate and be more appropriate for Hawaii and the West. For the Japanese Buddhist Tradition, of which I can really only speak of my own (the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji Denomination), we are trying to go beyond the Japanese ethnic identity associated with our Denomination and the perception by the general public that Japanese Buddhist temples are primarily concerned with funeral rites for the deceased and memorial services for ancestors.

For example, in the area of music, while still producing choral type music centered on the organ for temple services, we are creating new songs with more pieces having piano accompaniments and even with ukulele accompaniment and more contemporary lyrics. Further, very recently, we have indirectly promoted the creation of new more modern music which would strike a chord with the younger generations. A perfect example of some of these type of new songs are pieces performed by young people in the youth musical "Peace on Your Wings" like "Ichigo Ichie" created by Ohana Arts.

For chanting of the sutras, today, we are able to chant most of our sutras in English for the sake of comprehension and for those who have no affinity with

...we are trying to strike a balance between traditions from our past and new practices and customs... more appropriate for Hawaii and the West.

the Chinese and Japanese languages. However, we still have our Sino-Japanese chants which are more melodic and for those who prefer to hear them chanted in the traditional manner.

Also, in addition to weekly Sunday services, we are encouraging ministers and temples to provide more in the way of Buddhist education and related subject matters by providing interactive sessions so interested people can ask questions and learn more about Buddhism. An excellent program on Oahu Island is the Dharma Light Program housed at our Buddhist Study Center on University Avenue (across from the University of Hawaii Manoa campus) which provides classes on general Buddhism including Jodo Shinshu Buddhism for members and the larger community.

Our Buddhist Study Center Press, small as it is, has also published several books like "Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic" by Taitetsu Unno which is used in several colleges as a reading and "Hearing the Buddha's Call" by the late Rev. Jitsuen Kakehashi, a noted priest scholar of the Hongwanji Tradition.

In the Buddhist tradition, there has always been an emphasis on learning and wisdom which is so important in order to foster awareness and dispelling ignorance which causes suffering so that one and all can be happy and at peace and as such education is important. In India, there was the great Nalanda University. In China, great monasteries were often centers of higher learning. In Japan, during the Edo Period, Buddhism established what is known as "terakoya" or temple schools where the common people could learn to read, write and do simple math. It seems that the literacy rate in Tokugawa Japan was very high when compared to other parts of the world. In our Jodo Shinshu Denomination, the present day Ryukoku University which started as a seminary is the oldest university in Japan with over a 300-year history (similar in length to that of Harvard in the US). The current Hongwanji Educational School System is the largest private school system in Japan ranging from nursery schools to several universities with Ryukoku University at the apex. In Hawaii, it was our second Bishop, Bishop Yemyo Imamura, a Keio University graduate, who emphasized the value and importance of education and thus we saw the establishment of what was our Japanese Language School system which educated a number of well-known community leaders who impacted Hawaii's history.

In more recent times, the vision of having a solid educational system was revived and thus HHMH endeavored to create a high school, the Pacific Buddhist Academy, the first fully accredited college prep Jodo Shinshu Buddhist high school in the United States with an emphasis on peace education. PBA's education was not only about academics, it was also about nurturing a person's character and outlook. The goal was to nurture young leaders who would be caring critical thinkers who could express gratitude and would work for world peace and harmony with Wisdom and Compassion guiding them. Thus a major project of HHMH for over a decade has been the growth of Pacific Buddhist Academy.

Another major effort on the part of our Headquarters Office especially the Office of the Bishop has been community outreach in which we team with other community entities and organizations including Interfaith for the common good of our Hawaii and world community. A very active committee in Honpa Hongwanji is our Committee on Social Concerns which deals with providing financial assistance to entities addressing natural and man-made disasters and emergencies, other social issues and concerns of our society and peace related activities. Although there are various perspectives and opinions, Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii supported Marriage Equality, acknowledges the need to address the homeless/houseless concern facing our communities, and the great need to nurture world peace in light of the increasing incidents of violence, hatred, discrimination based on ethnicity, culture and religion which is occurring throughout the world. We are grateful for the support of the larger community for our programs like Project Dana, Living Treasures of Hawaii, and Peace Day.

The goal of the Honpa Hongwanji is to provide the Wisdom and Compassion of the Buddhist Teachings to the greatest number of people so it can inspire us to attain enlightenment and also guide us in our daily actions and lives so there is less suffering and more peace, joy and harmony in the world. Our HHMH mission statement reads: "To share the living Teachings of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism so that all beings may enjoy lives of harmony, peace and gratitude."

I am convinced that Buddhism can make a huge difference especially in our western society or world because in the West we seek values and guidance on how to live, day to day, from religion and because there is great meaning and depth to Buddhist Teachings with its emphasis on interdependence, non-violence, mutual respect and reflection including self-reflection. By providing Buddhist perspectives, we can help to alleviate people's suffering, confusion and fear that they are experiencing and fulfill the need for direction in life. Thus, we are taking an active role in social issues and community concerns by sharing Dharma perspectives.

Another area that we will be advancing in is the use of modern technology including social media. We will soon launch a new website. We realize we need to communicate with the tools and venues which the majority of people are utilizing today. The challenge is that there is a great disparity in that the young are quick to utilize new technology, but many of the older generation still rely on more traditional venues of communication and for an organization to provide communication in all the modes available to us in today.

I am emphasizing that... we are trying to share Buddhism in an environment and civilization that in many respects differs greatly from Asian civilizations.

Finally, it is a fact that many existing Buddhist organizations are ethnically clustered. We have Chinese Buddhist, Thai Buddhist, Vietnamese Buddhist, Japanese Buddhist and so forth. While not denying our (Japanese) roots and that of each group, I feel there is a need to become more universal or just plain Buddhist. Instead of relying heavily on ethnic or cultural values and behavior, as a Buddhist organization we need to exhibit more of the Buddhist values and perspectives as found in the Dharma or Teachings. This is especially important when we consider the culture, the society in which we, as Americans, live. We live in a very multi-cultured, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-generational, and very pluralistic society. We must be more understanding and sensitive of others and other cultures and our common denominator should be the Dharma or the Teachings. I am emphasizing that within our organization, we need an increased awareness that we are trying to share Buddhism in an environment and civilization that in many respects differs greatly from Asian civilizations. Buddhism's emphasis on inclusiveness, equality and mutual respect and appreciation is what should characterize our temples.

I conclude by saying that the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii of the Mahayana Pure Land Tradition of Buddhism is, once again, in transition as far as forms are concerned. However, the one certainty that does not change is that we want to share the message of All-Inclusive Wisdom and All-Embracing Compassion and aspiration for the peace, happiness and well-being of all sentient beings, all existence (which is, actually, the aspiration of the Enlightened Ones).

Thank you and Namō Amida Butsu (I entrust in the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and Infinite Light).



Eric Matsumoto is the 16th Bishop of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, the state's largest Buddhist denomination. He has a master's degree in Shin Buddhism from Ryukoku University and was resident minister of Moiliili Hongwanji on Oahu for eight years. He has also served at Big Island temples in Paauilo, Honokaa, Waimea, and Kohala.