



HONPA HONGWANJI MISSION OF HAWAII

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The following message was delivered by Bishop Eric Matsumoto, Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii.

A Tribute to Queen Lili'uokalani on the Occasion of Her 100th Memorial Service at Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin, October 30, 2016

Traditionally, in Hongwanji, we begin a Dharma Message/Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Sermon with an Opening Reflection. Today, I would like to share verses from the Metta Sutta. Please join me in a gesture of reverence and respect of your choosing which in the Buddhist Tradition would be anjali/gassho.

Opening Reflection:

“May all life be happy. May they be joyous and live in safety. All life, whether weak or strong, in high or middle or low realms of existence, small or great, visible or invisible, near or far, born or to be born. May all life be happy. Let none deceive another nor despise any life in any state; Let none by anger or hatred wish harm to another. Even as a mother at the risk of her life watches over and protects her only child, so with a boundless mind should one cherish all life, suffusing love over the entire world, above, below, and all around without limit; so let us cultivate an infinite goodwill toward the whole world.”
Namo Amida Butsu.

To our Honored Guests, Community Friends, and Members of the Hongwanji Sangha,

Aloha and E Komo Mai! Greetings, welcome and thank you for your presence here today!

As the 16th Bishop of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, it is with a heart full of gratitude and admiration that I express my deepest

respect for Her Majesty, Queen Lili'uokalani at this very special 100th Memorial Service in her honor. It was 115 years ago, during the time of our 2nd Bishop, Bishop Yemyo Imamura in 1901, that Her Majesty graced the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii with her presence at one of our annual major services, a birthday service in honor of our Sectarian Founder Shinran Shonin, along with Mrs. Mary Mikahala Foster at the Fort Lane Temple in Honolulu.

Perhaps it is hard for us, today, to grasp the significance of her visit and what it meant to the Buddhist community at the time. It was a challenging time for Buddhists when Buddhism was not yet fully accepted in the Islands. Thus the Queen's visit was a significant historical event in our 127-year history in Hawaii. It made the Buddhist religion acceptable in the eyes of many people. Her visit to Honpa Hongwanji made headlines here at home and throughout the world. Her willingness to visit a Buddhist temple, I surmise, was an expression of who she was. In her own words, "I was a studious girl: and the acquisition of knowledge has been a passion with me during my whole life..." I believe it was an expression of her openness, genuine quest for knowledge, courage to help others and willingness to embrace others. As I reflect on Her Majesty's life, though according to American Western historical accounts by 1901, overthrow and annexation had already taken place, I am sure life was not easy for Her Majesty. And yet, she was able to reach out and embrace others like we, of the Buddhist community. Today, as the Bishop of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, I express my deepest most sincere appreciation to Her Majesty, the Queen and also other individuals of Hawaiian ancestry like Mary Mikahala Foster for the extreme kindness shown to us.

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Today, as we gather at Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin Buddhist Temple for this 100th Memorial Anniversary in her honor, the Queen's recorded words from 1895, "I have pursued the path of peace and diplomatic discussion, and not that of internal strife" and "To prevent the shedding of the blood of my people, natives and foreigners alike, I opposed armed

interference, and quietly yielded to the armed forces brought against my throne...and have pursued the path of peace...” resonate strongly in my heart and mind. Our world today is troubled and plagued by so much violence, anger and discrimination, fear and unhappiness. We are in need of a new perspective to guide us. We must be guided and inspired by an All-Inclusive Wisdom and All-Embracing Compassion which bring us together and emphasize interdependence, mutual respect, self-reflection, non-violence and compassion for one another. Indeed, the Queen was a person of strength and character. It would have been so much easier to resort to violence and force, which was much more common, than to take the stance she did. She was truly a courageous person and a benevolent leader who thought of the people.

In Buddhist History, the name of two rulers come to mind, the Emperor Asoka of India and Prince Shotoku of Japan. Emperor Asoka of India came to realize the tremendous destruction and harm that fighting and war had caused and decided to embark on the promotion of peace, education and public welfare by building schools, hospitals (including hospitals for animals), orphanages, roads, bridges and stupas and stone pillars to mark religiously significant Buddhist sites. He became deeply concerned about the welfare of others. Prince Shotoku of Japan provided wise counsel by sharing *“Let us cease from wrath and refrain from angry looks. Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all people have hearts and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools.”*

Unless, we become aware of our self-centered tendencies whether as individuals, nations and even as humankind, become humble, and realize the oneness of all life, it will be challenging, to say the least, to solve our problems. Also, we must become more aware of the importance of harmony and non-violence. In Buddhism, ahimsa, non-violence, not to cause harm to another, is a valued virtue. A well-known modern Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh shares in *Ahimsa: The Path of Harmlessness*, *“Real peace must be based on insight and understanding, for this we must practice deep reflection – looking deeply into each act and each thought of our daily lives.”* *“If we work for peace out of anger, we will never succeed. Peace is not an end. It can never come about through non-peaceful means.”* *“We have to listen to everyone, especially those we consider our enemies. When we show*

our capacity for listening and understanding the other person will also listen to us. This is the beginning of healing.” “To create fundamental change, we, the members of society, have to transform ourselves. If we want real peace, we have to demonstrate our love and understanding...”

It is true that as Buddhists, we have not always been able to fully put into practice this important and virtuous teaching. His Eminence Koshin Ohtani of Jodo Shinshu (Honpa) Hongwanji shared in his book, *The Buddha’s Wish for the World*, in which he comments about Japan’s role in WW II, “*Buddhism was originally a religion that worked to soothe our desires and anger. Buddhism sought this effect on an individual level – this is its basic approach. It was truly unfortunate that Buddhist teachings were unable to exert much effect on the war. While this fact is one that I deeply regret, as I learn anew to take responsibility for the past, I feel even more compelled to make an earnest wish for peace in the world.*” He continues by emphasizing the preciousness of life and that we are all recipients of the immeasurable compassion of Amida Buddha, who will not rest until all living beings are saved.

Her Majesty, the Queen, I believe, also understood the meaning of the preciousness of life. I greatly respect her for her choice of peace and non-violence. On one hand, it is (was) an obvious choice from the standpoint of compassion, but in our world, as it is (was), it was not an easy choice. She had a deep love for the people of Hawaii. She always had the welfare of people in mind. The Queen also spoke of heritage, to all of us who call this special Land of Aloha, Hawai’i, our home, there is something special here that can make a difference in our entire world by making it a better place for all of us. Let us share that heritage, that gift, the Gift of Aloha with others in hopes that the world may become more harmonious and peaceful as Her Majesty envisioned. The Queen’s Legacy of perseverance, courage, non-violence, caring and sacrifice are truly noble. May we continue to be inspired by her words and actions, her songs, her life and most of all the person she was.

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Again, today, I humbly and gratefully pay my respects to Her Majesty with a heart full of gratitude. Finally to the planners of today's Memorial Service, I also express my gratitude and appreciation. To conclude, please join me in gassho/anjali, once more, for a Closing Reflection. I would like to share the words of His Eminence Koshin Ohtani.

“...Amida Buddha shines upon me and all of the rest of life, we are linked together as lives saved by that light. All things on earth, all things in the universe, are in the fold of this great life-force linking us all together. In this world, there is no life that was ever lived in vain. There is no life that is meaningless. All life is linked together. All of us share in the light that Amida Buddha shines upon us....”

Namo Amida Butsu/Entrusting in All-Inclusive Wisdom and All-Embracing Compassion (Amida Buddha)!



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.