

# **A Tribute to Queen Lili'uokalani on the Occasion of Her 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin, October 29, 2017**

*Dharma Message by Bishop Eric Matsumoto*

Please join in anjali or gassho, a gesture of reverence and respect in the Buddhist Tradition for an Opening Aspiration. Today, I would like to share a verse from the Metta Sutta.

Opening Aspiration:

*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 Special Honored Guests, Community Friends and Members of the Hongwanji Sangha, Aloha and E Komo Mai! Greetings and Welcome!

As the 16<sup>th</sup> Bishop of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, it is with a heart full of gratitude and admiration that I express my deepest respect to Her Late Majesty, Queen Lili'uokalani on this 100<sup>th</sup> year since her passing. It was 116 years ago, during the time of our 2<sup>nd</sup> Bishop, Bishop Yemyo Imamura, that Her Majesty, the Queen 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 at the Fort Lane Temple, the predecessor of this temple, on May 19, 1901. (This Pali Temple, as it is known today, was completed in 1918).

For us, living today, it is perhaps very difficult to fathom the significance of Her Majesty's Visit and what it meant to the Japanese Community and especially to Bishop Imamura and the Buddhists of the early 1900's. 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 128 year history in Hawaii. Some have even ventured to say that if it was

not for her visit Buddhism might not have been able to take root in Hawaii. The Queen's Visit made the Buddhist religion acceptable in the eyes of many people. Truly, we are indebted to people like Mary Elizabeth Mikahala Robinson Foster too, but the Queen's Visit to Hongwanji made a huge impact as it made headlines, locally and even internationally, as it was reported in the news of many countries throughout the world.

Her Majesty's willingness to visit a Buddhist Temple, I surmise, was an expression of who she was, in her own words, "...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, her courage to help and willingness to embrace others. It was her Aloha! As I reflect on Her Majesty's life, though by 1901 the overthrow and annexation had already taken place by American Western accounts, I am sure life was not easy for Her Majesty even though she had wonderful people surrounding her like Hikosuke Fujimoto, her Chief Steward and many others. However, despite her own hardships and challenges, the Queen reached out and embraced others like we, of the Buddhist community. Today, as the Bishop of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, I express my deepest and most sincere appreciation to Her Majesty and other individuals of Hawaiian ancestry like Mary Foster for the extreme kindness shown to us. It brings me great joy to know that Her Majesty found her visit to Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii to be a "profound spiritual experience."

Today, as we gather for this 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tribute in her honor, I would like to quote her 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..." and say that her words resonate strongly in my heart and mind. Our world today is troubled and plagued by so much discrimination, racism, violence, anger, fear and uncertainty. 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 brings us together and emphasizes interdependence, mutual respect, self-reflection, non-violence, harmony 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, but I believe she had the welfare of the people of Hawaii in mind when she chose the path of peace.

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 suffering that his years of fighting and conquest had caused and decided to embark on the promotion of peace, education and public welfare by building schools, hospitals including animal shelters, orphanages, roads and bridges and even stupas and stone pillars to

mark religiously significant Buddhist sites associated with Sakyamuni Buddha from whom he was now drawing inspiration. He became deeply concerned about the welfare of others. Prince Shotoku of Japan envisioned unifying a fractured and politically divided Japan and provided wise counsel by sharing insights from Buddhist Teachings as

*“Harmony is to be valued.” “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. . . .Therefore, although others give way to anger, on the contrary, let us dread our own faults...”*

(Adapted from “Sources of Japanese Traditions, Volume One by Wm. Theodore de Bary, Editor).

Unless, we become aware of our self-centered egotistic tendencies whether as individuals, nations, adherents of one religion, and even as humankind and become humble and realize the oneness of all life, it will be challenging, to say the least, to solve our problems and predicament. 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 (Ahimsa: The Path of Harmlessness) shares

*“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.” “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 of non-violence. 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, ultimately, understood the meaning of the preciousness of life especially the loving and caring of the young, the children.

The Queen spoke of heritage, to all of us who call Hawai'i, our home, you do not need me to tell you that there is something special here in Hawaii, that can make a difference in our entire world. Let us share that heritage, the Gift of Aloha with the rest of the world in hopes that the world may become more peaceful and harmonious.

Towards this effort or endeavor, I would like to suggest to my fellow Buddhists that we, as Buddhists, share the spirit of Sangha with harmony as its essence with the rest of the world. The book “The Teaching of the Buddha” by the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism/BDK describes the Sangha in the following way, slightly adapted, “Thousands of people may live in a community, but it is not a true community until people know each other and have empathy for one another. A true community has faith and wisdom that illuminate it. It is a place where people know and trust one another and there is harmony.” May we expand the application of Sangha to be the entire world. I propose that we see the whole world as our community. More than ever, we need to see the whole world as our community and realize the importance of interdependence as His Eminence Kojun Ohtani, our new 25<sup>th</sup> Spiritual Leader emphasizes. He points out a very pertinent fact when he says “The weakness of our relationships with each other is the result of us thinking about ourselves more than others.” Let us try to mutually respect one another and care for one another. If today's Tribute can accomplish even a minute part of expanding our circle of inclusiveness, then, it is worth our time and effort to be here.

To conclude, the Queen's Legacy of perseverance, courage, caring and sacrifice are truly noble. May we continue to be inspired by her words and actions, her songs and her life. Again, today, I humbly and gratefully pay my respects to Her Majesty with a heart full of gratitude.

Finally, to the members of the Hawaiian Community (The Royal Societies, the Keohokalole Family and Lili'uokalani Trust) and the Family of Hikosuke and Kikuyo Fujimoto (Chief Steward to the Queen), I express my deepest gratitude and appreciation for your attendance here today. Also, a special thank you to those who came all the way from the Big

Island (Prof. Jackie Pualani Johnson, Retired UH Hilo Drama Professor who will be doing a special portrayal of the Queen and KT Cannon-Eger and Barbara Fujimoto who planned the 100<sup>th</sup> Memorial Service held, last year, at Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin Buddhist Temple in Hilo). Lastly, thank you to each and everyone here today for your attendance! Please accept my deepest Mahalo!

Please join me in gassho/anjali for a Closing Reflection as we express gratitude to All-Inclusive Wisdom and All-Embracing Compassion. I would like to share the words of His Eminence Koshin Ohtani, Spiritual Leader Emeritus of the Hongwanji from his book, *The Buddha's Wish for the World*.

*...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 the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and Infinite Light