

## Entrust ourselves to compassion of Amida



Photo from Bloomberg.com

The Wind Phone, located in the town of Otsuchi on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean, is a place where people go to feel the connection they have to someone who has passed away.

*The following is from a Dharma message that was shared on March 15, 2026.*

**By Rev. Chiemi Onikura Bly**

**G**ood morning everyone. Thank you very much for coming to the family service at the Midwest Buddhist Temple. It is very nice to be together here this morning.

I'd like to begin by reading a hymn by Shinran Shonin. So please join me in gassho.

*Since Amida Buddha attained enlightenment, more than 10 kalpas have passed. The light of his wisdom shines without limit and illuminates this world of darkness.*

—*Namu Amida Butsu*

It's so nice to be here in person. So, thank you for inviting me this morning. I'm Rev. Chiemi Onikura Bly, living in Minnesota. Just a neighbor, right? A little bit colder than here. I have lived in Minnesota for more than 25 years now. And it's been 10 years already since the first time I came here to the Midwest Buddhist Temple as part of the training to be a minister's assistant.

Since then, I've studied at the Chuo Bukkyo Gakuin, which is a correspondence course

*see phone, page 4*

## Ohigan: A time for reflection, meditation

*The following is from a Dharma message that was shared on March 22, 2026.*

**By Rev. Ron Miyamura**

**T**oday is Ohigan, the holiday observed twice a year, at the time of the equinox—both in the spring and the autumn, when the days and the nights are even. It is said, that the world is more in harmony at these times of the year.

Click this [link](#) to hear David Martin's Dharma message from March 8, 2026.

Ohigan refers to the Other Shore of Amida's Pure Land and is the time for reflecting on the Six Paramitas. This is a time

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### inside



#### ◀ Dharma School corner

Students get ready to share the Life of Buddha story for Hanamatsuri. *Page 11.*

#### ■ Feeding the unhoused

Volunteers make and deliver 190 sandwiches to Sarah's Circle, North Side Housing for Men, Ewing Annex Men's Hotel and a small tent city. *Page 9.*

# happenings

By Elaine Matsushita

We are sad to say that **Taryn Hutt** has tendered her resignation as office manager effective April 9. Though we are sad to lose her, we are happy for Taryn as she has found a career opportunity.

We are working through a transition plan and will be posting her position shortly. We wish Taryn the best and thank her for her many contributions and dedication to MBT.

**True 'Collaborators' Elaine and Rev. Ron Miyamura** were off to the UK in March for "our week of traveling to three different cities to see [the UK-based musical theatre group and "Britain's Got Talent" winners] **Collabro**.

"We were fortunate enough to score Meet and Tickets for each of the cities," says No. 1 fan Elaine, "so I got to meet them—again—and have my picture taken with them. Three days in a row! Unlike concert-goers in the U.S., the people in the UK are very respectful of the performers thus they can offer Meet and Greets where everyone gets a one-on-one with them.

"I never followed any group when I was young, but I am such a fan-girl. This tour was called 'Harmonies' and only had a pianist for accompaniment and was performed in 12 different cathedrals throughout the UK. The acoustics and settings



Photos from Ellen Dunleavy and Brandy Andresen venture to the Japanese Cultural Center to take in the Hinamatsuri celebration.

were beyond wonderful. Their music and the blend of their voices got me through some of the toughest times as my mom's health was failing and her subsequent passing—during the pandemic."

And thanks in part to careful planning and the blessings of his medical team, Rev. Ron was able to enjoy all the traveling.

Not only did Elaine and Rev. Ron get to enjoy Collabro, but they also got to meet "a lot of very nice people," says Elaine, "and we made a new friend from the Netherlands! We will become pen pals."

So happy for Elaine and Rev. Ron!

**Newest Sangha member! Lisa Doi and Eric Langowski** welcomed **Lily Langowski Doi** on March 6, 2026. "We're all doing well



Photo from Lisa Doi  
Lisa Doi and Eric Langowski welcomed Lily Langowski Doi to our world on March 6.

and settling into our new life together. We are grateful for the Sangha that Lily gets to join." Big congratulations to

Lisa and Eric (and Grandpa **Jac Cerney** and Grandma **Mary Doi**).

**Girls Day Brandy Andresen and Ellen Dunleavy** went to the Japanese Cultural Center for their Hinamatsuri celebration in early March. "We made matcha shots, did Ikebana and took part in a tea ceremony," says Ellen. "I did a *cha no yu* course a couple of years ago and was very happy to see my sensei again."

**YBA gathering**  
The **Sumida Yu** family attended the Bay District YBA conference at the Palo Alto Buddhist Temple on March 21. "It was wonderful to meet and reconnect with Sangha members from across the Bay Area and to nurture

see **happenings**, page 7

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Don't forget to visit our website, [mbtchicago.org](http://mbtchicago.org), for more information about Shin Buddhism and the Midwest Buddhist Temple.



Photos from Nicole Sumida

Jason Matsumoto discusses Full Spectrum Features' trilogy of films about the Japanese American experience of incarceration, resettlement and redress and introduces the premiere of 'Enough.'

## 'Enough' premieres at Day of Remembrance

By Nicole Sumida

On Sunday, Feb. 23, we gathered at the Chicago History Museum for the annual Day of Remembrance program and premiere of "Enough," a film about the Japanese American Redress Movement, directed by Brian Tee and produced by Full Spectrum Features.

Mari and Kailani Yu were invited to read the removal order at the opening and a panel of esteemed guests followed the screening, sharing the work of JACL and individuals engaged in social justice activism and community mental health.

Last fall, Alex and I had the honor to play extras during the film production on Northeastern University's campus, where the 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians hearings took place. We met Tamlyn Tomita, who also acted in the film, and who has been a favorite of ours since the "Joy Luck Club" days. What a thrill!

Congratulations to Jason Matsumoto and Full Spectrum Features for completing the trilogy of films about the Japanese American experience of incarceration, resettlement and redress. We are grateful that our daughters and their generation will have these films and educational websites to illuminate their history and to teach others about the importance of advocating for each other during times of injustice.



## phone

*Continued from page 1*

from Japan, and then I went to Tokodo ordination. After that, I also went to Kyoshi ordination.

And I've been serving at the Twin Cities Sangha for 10 years now and have also just started serving the San Mateo Buddhist Temple in California the beginning of this year. So I'm traveling around a lot.

But it's so good to be here to see the familiar faces. This temple is my second home, beside the Minnesota temple—and the Jodo Shinshu temple I grew up in Japan.

I'm so grateful to have a temple here in this country that I can visit and be welcomed like coming back home. So, I'm so grateful to be here today.

So, today, through the teaching of the Buddha, I'd like to reflect together with you on what it means to become a Buddha—to be born by a parent and then to live in a world where we will meet again.

Today is March 15, and just four days ago, March 11, Japan, my home country, marked the 15th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that occurred in 2011.

Every year around this time, many programs appear in the Japanese media remembering that day. The television programs and documentaries revisit what happened then. They show the towns that were destroyed. They share the stories of the people who lived there and they remind us of the impermanence and fragility of life.

And because life is impermanent, we are reminded how precious each moment is and how important it is to live each day fully.

According to the official report, more than 20,000 lives were lost—including those who died, those who remain missing, and those whose deaths were later connected to the disaster. Entire towns along the north/northeastern coast of Japan were swept away by the tsunami.

Many many families lost

parents, children, friends and neighbors. Even now, 15 years later, many people continue to live while carrying the deep grief.

So, in connection with these stories, one place in Japan has become widely known. It is called the Wind Phone. Some of you may already know about it. Over the years, the story of the Wind Phone had spread around the world. It appears in documentaries. It has inspired the essay and the stories. There have been films and television dramas based on it.

The Wind Phone is located in the town of Otsuchi in Iwate Prefecture, on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Inside the very small white phone booth sits an old rotary telephone. But this telephone is not connected to any telephone line. There are no wires. Today, when we hear "no wires," that may not sound very unusual because our cellphones have no wires either. But we may imagine that this phone is connected somehow by signals or Wi-Fi or something, but this phone is different.

It is not connected by wires or cell phone signals or any Wi-Fi or anything. In fact, it is not connected to anything at all.

Some of you may remember your old telephone that was attached to the wall with a long cord. I hope most of you remember that, right? I hope so. Maybe you don't, maybe you have never seen that.

But this phone is not connected even like that. OK? So, it cannot call anyone. It cannot receive calls. No voice will ever come back through the receiver.

In other words, it is the telephone that is connected to nowhere. And, yet, thousands of people have come here and they step inside the booth and they pick up the receiver and, then, they speak to someone they love who has passed away. So they say the words they never heard the chance to say. So they say "Thank you," they say "I miss you," and then they speak from their hearts. Before I say more about this place, I'd like to show you a

short 3½-minute video.

\*\*\*

*High in the hills above Otsuchi, on the coast of northern Japan where the wind blows and the pine forests grow. There sits a white glass-panel phone booth facing out to the ocean. Inside is an old-fashioned black telephone connected to nothing and nowhere. A phone where the living can call those who have died.*

*"I knew that no one would respond to me, but I felt that my wife was there.*

*"So I told her that our daughters and I were looking for her body for a long time, and we almost gave up. And on the last day, we went on searching. We found her, and I told her that I know you cannot come back but I can go to you in the future. It's like when you close your eyes but you still feel someone is listening to you. I was so happy. I was very happy."*

\*\*\*

*"Hello, Nobuyuki, it's Dad. What are you doing now? Are you with mom? It's been eight years since that tsunami, four years since she has gone. I'm just managing to keep working, to keep going. I'll come back again when spring comes. Thank you so much, Nobuyuki.*

*"If all of us were still here together—your mom, me and you, things would be better. I do my best to keep on going. Hang in there. Please look after your mom."*

\*\*\*

This small phone booth has become a very special place for many people. People go there because they still feel connected to the person they lost. Of course, the phone is not really connected to anyone, but something important happens there.

The people speak honestly from their heart. They remember the love they shared. And many people say that when they leave the booth, their hearts feel a little lighter. And they speak from their hearts—perhaps knowing that the people they have really been searching for

have no voice but they get the reassurance that the love is still connected.

So when I first heard about the Wind Phone, I began to ask myself the question: Where is my Wind Phone? For some people, it may be the obutsudan, your home altar.

Myself, when I when I am at my home obutsudan, I think about the people I love who are born into the Pure Land, across the other shore. In the Jodo Shinshu, the obutsudan, the altar is not simply a place for the memorial rituals. It is a place where we encounter the Buddha and then listen to the Dharma. It is also a place where we remember those who have gone before us.

When we stand before the obutsudan altar, we often remember someone we love. We may speak to them quietly in our hearts.

In this way, the altar can be something like our own Wind Phone. But in Jodo Shinshu, it is even more than that. The obutsudan is not the telephone that connects to us to the dead people but, rather, the place where we encounter Amida Buddha's wisdom and compassion—which embraces both the living and the deceased.

It is a place where we realize that we are all held within the same boundless compassion.

So in Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, when someone we love dies, we say they were born in the Pure Land—the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. It is also called *ojo* in Japanese—birth in the Pure Land.

But sometimes people wonder what it really means. Does it mean going to somewhere far away? Does it mean disappearing into the another world?

It is a teaching of Jodo Shinshu. The Pure Land is not simply another place somewhere in the universe. Rather, it is a realm of complete awakening—the world free from suffering, ignorance and fear.

*see phone, page 5*

# Phone of the Wind: Passages

*This is an essay reprinted from the May 2021 issue of the Bulletin.*

By Steve Arima

**I**chi-go, Ichi-e” is a cultural concept of treasuring the unrepeatable nature of a moment, and translates to “each time is once in a lifetime.” We hear Rev. Ron’s messages: “Human existence is impermanence and change.” This essay contains fictional conversations from the Wind Phone that Itaru Sasaki installed and which Rev. Chiemi Onikura Bly talked about in her Dharma message on March 15.

\*\*\*

The salty brine of the sea wind blowing up the hillscape filters through the sharp, sweet, refreshing smell of the piney conifers—giving the essence of nature’s incense floating through the air. Snow lightly falling blankets the ground with displays of glistening white over the green winter grasses. Thoughts floating in the wind.

Seventy-year-old Itaru Sasaki installed the Phone of the Wind, which stands in a private garden on a hillside field overlooking the ocean. He moved to Otsuchi Town 17 years earlier after falling in love with the beautiful view of the sea.

At first, the telephone booth was for himself, he wanted to talk to his cousin who died in the 2011 Japan Great Earthquake and Tsunami. Over 20,000 perished and 2,500 remain missing from the disaster. “The phone won’t carry my voice, so I let the wind do it.”

Knowing he was not alone in his grief, Itaru Sasaki made his telephone booth available to everyone. He said, “No matter how hard it is, hope makes life worth living.” The telephone booth connected to “nowhere” draws men and women from near and far.

\*\*\*

A man slowly nears and enters the phone booth on this new winter day.

“Sachiko ... can you hear me? ... Are you OK?” Takayuki asks. “Where are you? I left a message saying where I

was but I think you couldn’t read it. ... I’ve been desperately searching for you everywhere. Are you OK?”

“Are you cold? Are you scared?” he says, his voice quivering as tears fill his eyes. “Where are you? I want to hear you, I miss you.

“I am rebuilding a new home in the same exact place so you know where to find me. Please hurry home to me, I hope you are alive, somewhere.”

Crestfallen, Takayuki turns, opens the glass door and returns to the forever-changed world. He slowly walks away as a bell ringing can be heard in the distance. As time passes, another person nears.

Walking slowly, the man stops as he nears the remote refuge. Moving closer, he stares and closes his eyes squeezing them tightly, then slowly reaches out, opens the door and enters the booth.

Hiroshi, a middle-aged company man, traveled hours by train from Tokyo to Otsuchi Town to ease his grief, to speak with his wife and child who were lost on the 11th day of March 2011. Many “company” men like Hiroshi commute long distances to work as a somewhat necessary way of working life. Tokyo is now his home.

Cradling the old phone’s handset with both hands, shakily, he speaks, “Otouto-san [dad], Okaa-san [mom], Keiko, Otaru, it’s been five years since the disaster.” His voice is now breaking into sobs. “Sometimes ... I don’t know what I’m living for.

“Otaru ... please let me hear your voice saying ‘Daddy’ again. ... I have a new house but without you ... and Otaru ... Dad ... and Mom, there’s no meaning. ... I want to hear your voices” again. Silence fills the empty cold air. “I’m sorry I couldn’t save you. I’m sorry I wasn’t there with you.” After a long silence, he hangs up, turns and exits. A clapper tied with a paper tail in a small cast-iron bell rings in the wind.

Hanami Ota is accompanied today by her two grandchildren. She often visits alone,

but this day, her grandchildren joined her because of a school holiday. Entering together and barely tall enough to reach the phone, Hanami hands the handset to her eldest grandson, Ichiro.

Smiling, he says, “Ojii-chan [grandfather], how are you? I’ll be in third grade, can you believe it? I’m fine. Bye.”

Second grandson Jiro’s turn is next. “Ojii-chan? Hi, I finished all my homework, I miss you. Can you see me?” Giggling he hands the phone back to grandmother.

The two young boys loved Ojii-chan. Many times he took them for walks, sometimes eating slices of apples they picked from nearby trees. He told them many stories of how nature and animals need each other. He always, always, gave his time to each of his loved ones.

Receiving the phone back and in a sunny voice, Hanami says, “Don’t they sound good? They make me so happy.

“We all think about you. ....me, everyday. Words are not enough. Hurry home to me. I hope you are alive somewhere.” With a smile, they step out, turn, and bow to the booth and say “bye.” The boys with their Oba-chan shuffle and laugh walking back through the snow-covered stone path.

As the sun begins to set, one last visitor, an older woman walking behind a metal frame walker to assist her, arrives at her destination. Without speaking a word, she stops for a time, her eyes closed, head bowed, and without entering the booth, she tells herself “life was good with you. Did I ever tell you?”

“For 65 years, we were together, each day, working through life, caring for each other. Did I ever tell you? ... I will go on and live as if you are still with me, each day.”

With hands clasped together she repeats, “Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu” (the Nembutsu, thanking with gratitude to Buddha.)

Life goes on, the only thing that has not changed is change. Change is unchanging, each moment happens once.

“Ichi-go, Ichi-e.” ... A bell rings in the wind.

## phone

*Continued from page 4*

So when we say someone is born in the Pure Land, we mean that they are embraced by Amida Buddha’s boundless compassion and awakened to the truth of reality. In another word, they become Buddhas.

But then another question naturally arises. What does it mean to become a Buddha?

Originally, the word Buddha means one who is awakened. The Buddha is someone who is completely freed from suffering, fear and confusion.

But in the Pure Land, the Pure Land teaching, to

become a Buddha does not mean disappearing. It means awakening to the limitless wisdom and compassion.

The Buddha is often described as light. So Amida Buddha’s wisdom and compassion are expressed as the boundaries and lights—and it shines everywhere.

Lights that reaches places where our hands cannot reach. Lights travel farther than our voices can travel.

In the same way, when someone becomes a Buddha, their compassion is no longer limited by the body they once had this world. So they

see *phone*, page 6

## **Okoshi (Rice crackers)**

### **Ingredients**

2 cups\* rice, cooked and dried (separate grains by rolling with rolling pin)  
Vegetable oil, for frying  
¼ tsp. salt  
¼ cup black sesame seeds  
¼ cup white sesame seeds  
1 cup sugar  
3 cups Rice Krispies

\*Approximately 3 cups of cooked rice measures 2 cups of dried rice. Spread cooked rice on cookie sheet and air dry. Leftover rice may be used.

### **For syrup**

1 cup Karo light corn syrup  
2 Tbsp. sugar (heaping)

### **Directions**

1. In 3" of hot vegetable oil, fry approximately 1/3 cup of the cooked and dried rice at a time, until light brown and puffy (stirring constantly). Drain on paper towel.

2. For syrup, combine corn syrup and sugar in small pot and bring to a boil; lower heat to medium and cook approximately 2 minutes or until a drop of syrup forms soft ball in cold water.

3. Combine dried rice with black and white sesame seeds, sugar and Rice Krispies. Pour syrup on rice mixture and quickly mix; pour onto greased cookie sheet. Place wax paper on top and press down evenly with a rolling pin.

4. Place okoshi in refrigerator for no longer than 15 mins.

*To order a copy of "Oishii Cookery," send a check (\$15, if picked up at the temple; \$20, if mailed—made out to MBT Women's Association) to MBT, 435 W. Menomonee St., Chicago, IL 60614.*

## **phone**

*Continued from page 5*

become like light.

Their compassion can reach everywhere.

It reaches those who are suffering. It reaches those who feel lost or alone. And it gently guides us toward awakening. In this way, those who have gone before us, do not disappear from our lives. They become a part of a great working of Amida's compassion.

So Shinran Shonin expressed this very simply in his words. He said to simply entrust yourself to the Nembutsu—Namu Amida Butsu—and then be embraced by Amida Buddha. Entrusted in Amida's compassion, those who have gone before us and then those of us who remain here are embraced by the same light.

In the light of Amida Buddha, separation is never the final word.

There is a beautiful phrase in Buddhism: *ku e isho*—it means we will meet again in the same place. So when we place our hands together in gassho, we may feel something very similar to what people experience at the Wind Phone. For the moment, our hearts may feel a little brighter. Perhaps we feel as if we hear that gentle voice saying, "It is OK, you don't need to worry. I am always with you."

And when we say Namu Amida Butsu, we entrust ourselves to the compassion of Amida Buddha.

It can feel like gently leaning back into the chair. If you get tired, you want to sit on a chair. But if the back of the chair is wiggling and not stable, are you going to lean

back on the chair? No, you can't, right? But you trust the chair. You know that the chair supports your back. That's why you can sit like this.

And so, too, through the teaching of the Jodo Shinshu, we are able to experience this deep sense of assurance. With this, you feel like I am OK with the support of the Buddha.

With this, I will conclude today's Dharma message. And I would like to read once more the words of Shinran Shonin that we began with today. So please join me in gassho.

*Since Amida Buddha attained enlightenment, more than 10 kalpas has passed. The light of his wisdom shines without limit and illuminates this world of darkness.*

Namu Amida Butsu. Thank you very much.



**Bulbs**

**Seeds**

**and more!**

# Spring flowers

— MBT FUNDRAISER —

Proceeds from The Spring Flower Fundraiser will benefit MBT. The funds will benefit the Legacy Garden. Thank you!

<http://mbt.fpfundraising.com/>



**Now thru 5/15**

# happenings

*Continued from page 2*

the next generation in the teachings of Amida Buddha," says **Nicole**. More to come...

**Greetings from Kay Arima Elaine Ogawa and Steve Arima** recently traveled to Gardena, Calif., to visit Steve's mother **Kay Arima**. She is 98. "Mom was so happy to see us," says Steve. "We all had tears in our eyes. Since September, Mom has been in home hospice. My brother, **Craig** and his wife **Louise**, take care of her every day. Despite Mom's dementia, she is as sunny as ever! Her spirit is bright, she is funny, she loves to chat and she enjoys her food—especially dessert! Mom speaks fondly of all her dear friends at MBT and all the memorable times."

**Happy birthday to...**  
Be sure to wish a happy birthday to our April birthday "girls" and "boys:"

- Kyle Tsuchiya** / April 1
- Joseph Taura** / April 6
- Melissa Maslanka** / April 6
- Dylan Yamada** / April 8
- Mike Naito** / April 8
- Naoki Adachi Yarmolinsky** / April 9
- Dan Peterson** / April 10
- Josh Fidler** / April 14
- Jim Chikaraishi** / April 25
- Eric Arima** / April 28

*If there is someone's birthday you would like mentioned in future issues, please send their name and birthdate to [elaine.matsushita@mbtchicago.org](mailto:elaine.matsushita@mbtchicago.org).*



**Above:** The Sumida Yu family attends the Bay District YBA conference at the Palo Alto Buddhist Temple.



**Left:** Collabro, the UK-based musical theatre group and "Britain's Got Talent" winners, are joined by their No. 1 fan, Elaine Miyamura. Elaine and Rev. Ron spent a week in the United Kingdom in March, traveling to three different cities to catch and visit with Collabro.

Photo, top, from Nicole Sumida; photo, left, from Elaine Miyamura.



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# JASC Soup & Rice event aids MBT Outreach project

By Joy Zavala

On Friday, Feb 20, the Japanese American Service Committee had its Soup & Rice event to help the unhoused, with donations going to MBT's Homeless Project. There were seven delicious soups made by talented chefs, including Steve Arima who made a delicious chicken noodle soup.

Although the weather was cold and windy, there were many attendees.


Jesse Zavala spoke about our program, and there was over \$400 in donations. We are so grateful to the JASC for including us in their program, the chefs for their amazing



soups, and people for attending and donating to our

Homeless Project. Socializing with new people was fun,

creating connections for possible future collaborations.



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Photos by Joy Zavala

Volunteers, above, pack up sandwiches with other lunch sides. Below, volunteers get to work making sandwiches in the temple kitchen. And, below right, an unhoused man receives a New Life for Old Bags sleeping mat made by Joanne Tohei.

## Volunteers make, deliver 190 sandwiches to unhoused

By Joy Zavala

The Homeless Project sandwich-making day on Feb 28 had 17 volunteers. Together, volunteers who made sandwiches at home and those who made them at MBT made 190 sandwiches that were delivered to Sarah's Circle, North Side Housing for Men, Ewing Annex Men's Hotel and a small tent city.

Thanks to all our volunteers who helped make sandwiches shopped for ingredients, cleaned and packed grapes (Sarah's Circle bags require fruit and a granola bar), packed bags and delivered to the various locations.

We also gave away three New Life for Old Bags sleeping



mats made from reused plastic bags by MBT Buddhist Women's Association members. One gentleman was very happy to receive a mat (made by Joanne Tohei)

so he could have a softer area to sleep on instead of a concrete sidewalk. He also appreciated that the mat makers recycle plastic bags to help the environment.



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# Remember: Don't take anyone's name for granted

*The following is from a Dharma message that was shared with the Dharma School students on March 1, 2026.*

**By Cynthia Koza/Backseat Mee**

I want to thank the Dharma School Students for attending our monthly Memorial Services. I think it is so important you come and participate.

I also want to thank the Dharma School students for being flexible last month when you were scheduled to lead the Nirvana Day Service but the temple had to close and you could not lead the service as planned—though Adrian and Isabella did share the readings. The Sangha is grateful to each of you for sharing your talents with us. Your current participation and leadership in temple activities not only impacts Midwest Buddhist Temple today but also in its future.

Some of the names that were read so beautifully this morning were people who helped to establish and create the Midwest Buddhist Temple. Their work and dedication allow us to sit here today and to learn the teachings of the Dharma. I try to carefully listen to the names while they are being read. I only know a few names. You may know some of the people whose names were shared today. Some could be your ancestors.

Names, in many ways, identify who we are. A name is more than just a name. Many names may have significant connections to someone or something. We might be named after an ancestor, a family member, an athlete or an author, a flower, a name suggested by friends or other family members.

I remember once asking my mother "Why I was named Cynthia?" She said I was named after a shero in a book that she had read. I asked her what book but she didn't remember the book's name. I

did some modest research to find out what book might have been written before I was born that had a main female character named Cynthia. I didn't find anything, but maybe I will someday.

I have also been known as Cyndee, Thia, Dr. Mee, Gigi, Professor. A relatively new name I now have is Koza, my Buddhist name.

When our Minister Assistant Program classes were coming to end Rev Ron asked us to think about what we would like our Buddhist names to be and to give him suggestions that embrace some of our characteristics or behaviors. It didn't take me long to identify my preferred Buddhist name. I suggested "Backseat."

I know it sounds like a strange name, but many years ago, while attending an Eastern Buddhist League Conference at the New York Buddhist Church, the service was ready to begin. I was standing in the back of the hondo when a friend kiddingly said, "Why don't you go up front and sit where the expensive seats are?"—meaning the front rows.

I said, "No, I need to sit in the back seat for various reasons." He then said, "Oh, then, you are a Backseat Buddhist." I loved when he shared that because it was so true.

For example, when we started coming to MBT several years ago, we always sat in the back row, and we still do. Sometimes we get bumped from "our" seats and that's OK, except then we might have to "bump" someone else.

As soon as I returned home the conference, I started a blog (that's when blogs were popular), called "Backseat Buddhist." I didn't write on the blog often, but when I did, I shared some of my Buddhist perspectives and thoughts.

So, when Rev. Ron asked us to identify a Buddhist name that might have

some significant spiritual importance and characteristics, I knew I was going to suggest "Backseat."

While doing research for my Buddhist name, Rev. Ron learned that "Koza" has many meanings and is somewhat related to "backseat." I have also researched "Koza" a little and, loosely translated through my understanding, found it can mean something like: lecture-hall unit, a high seat or high platform, position gathering, to sit, to observe, to watch, to think, to check things out, and to reach across the aisle. "Koza" does not literally mean just sitting in the backseat.

I love being a Backseat Buddhist.

## Shinran's names

In a Sunday service and in Dharma School, you have learned about Shinran, his life and some of his teachings. We have learned that Shinran had a variety of names throughout his life. At different times, he became known by a different name that identified that period in his life.

1. His birthname was Matsuwakamaro.
2. When he entered the monastery at 9 years old, his name became Hanen.
3. After he left the monastery and became a disciple of Honen, his name was changed to Shakkū.
4. At one point, Honen, his teacher, named him Zenshin.
5. Eventually his name became Shinran, combining names of two of the Seven Masters.
6. For a while, Shinran also known as Fujii Yoshizane.
7. After he was exiled, Shinran name himself Gutoku meaning "Bald Fool," identifying his new status as "neither a monk, nor a layperson."
8. After his death Shinran was posthumously given the title Kenshin Daishi.

We, too, for various reasons,

like Shinran, may have a variety of names.

Do you have different names? What are you usually called? Who calls you what? Maybe your teachers call you one name but, at home, your family members may call you something different.

My brother's name is Kirk, that's what I called him and what his teachers and friends called him. But my father called him "Skipper" or "Ike." I don't know why. I guess I should ask him some time.

Yes, our names can identify who we are and may also define us in different ways.

Do you know why you have the name you have? Are you named after a family member of a family friend? My son's full name is Omniobadiah Kirkjohnathan (some are family names that go back six or seven generations. The family name Obadiah goes back to 1610.)

Do you have a nickname?

Maybe sometime during Dharma School, you can talk with each other about and share why you have your name.

Maybe on your way home today or eating lunch or dinner you can talk with your family members and discuss why you have the name you have and why they have the names they have.

But most importantly, if you could choose your Buddhist name, what would you want it to be? What spiritual, Buddhist characteristics do you want to represent you in your Buddhist name?

Remember, don't take anyone name's for granted. Names represent many things. Most importantly, don't take your name for granted.

Again, on behalf of the Sangha, we are grateful for your commitment to MBT.



Photos by Allison Hagio-Conwell

## Getting ready to share Life of Buddha story

By Jennifer Toguri

The Dharma School classrooms are full of energy again. Our students are moving full steam ahead with lessons and preparations for one of our favorite times of the year: Hanamatsuri.

In March and April, our younger classes are focusing on the Six Paramitas and how to practice them in our daily lives. We are also learning about the Life of the Buddha and preparing to share the story during the

Hanamatsuri Service.

In addition, we continue to have our Teen Class in practical discussions about applying Buddhism to the unique challenges of being a teenager today.

It wouldn't be Hanamatsuri or the "Flower Festival" without some serious floral flair. The kids are busy creating vibrant handmade flowers to celebrate the Buddha's birthday. Be sure to see the colorful progress they're making—it's a great reminder that spring (and Hanamatsuri) is just around the corner.

### Upcoming Dates to Remember

**April 5** / Dharma School Class & Flower Crafting

**April 12** / Hanamatsuri Service (student-led)

**April 19** / Dharma School Class & Buddhism for Teenagers session

**May 3** / A delicious brunch hosted by the Dharma School

**May 17** / Dharma School

For the most up-to-date schedule, please keep an eye on the MBT weekly email. See you in class!

*Once faith is decisively settled, we should—sleeping or waking—just say the Nembutsu in gratitude, joyfully remembering that we have received Amida Tathagata's benevolence beyond measure.*

*That is indeed the practice that truly returns the Buddha's benevolence.*

# Hard is it to be born in the and now we are living ...

*The following is from a Dharma message that was shared on March 1, 2026.*

## By Cynthia Koza Mee

It is so good to be back again and seeing everyone. Please put your hands in Gassho.

*Taitestu Unno shares: "To die or not to die ... we really don't have a choice. We can, therefore, only take care of our life-body, until the fullness of time and being ends our existence on Earth."*

As we learn in The Three Treasures, "How rare and wondrous it is to have been born into human life and now I live it," when we enter this world, unknown to us at that time, we are starting a lifetime path. We accept the gift of life because we were just born into it and, then, each day after we move forward on our life paths until our deaths.

We learn early in our lives that our life and spiritual paths may not be flat or straight. Throughout our life experiences, we encounter some bumps, twists and turns that challenge us.

I grew up in southwest Ohio. Most of our roads and some streets are challenging to drive; they are very hilly and curvy. Now, when I go home, it takes me a day or two to get use to driving the hills and winding roads—because up here, in the Chicago area, our streets are straight and flat.

Some individuals may live lives a little flatter and straighter than others, while others' lives are more winding like those roads in southwest Ohio and some mountainous states.

In our monthly memorial services, we celebrate others whose life paths have ended, regardless of how bumpy or how flat. Each Memorial Service is impressive because names of some of those who preceded us in death are recognized. Reading their names out loud helps us to remember them.

Most of the names read at each service are of people I have never met in my life. But to hear their names allows me to know them, in some small way, and that they had lived. As we honor their lives, we recognize that they were born into this world, that they have lived in this world and, now, that they have died in this world and have physically left this world.

Our memorial services remind me of another Unno quote: "Buddhism is a path of supreme optimism, for one of its basic tenets is that no human life or experience is to be wasted, abandoned or forgotten, but all should be transformed into a source of vibrant life, deep wisdom and compassionate living."

The reading of the names in our memorial service helps us to reflect on their possible

vibrant lives and remember possible shared-life experiences. We remember them, and they are not forgotten.

As I shared with the Dharma School students (*see story on page 10*), names have great significance. Our practice of reading the names reminds me of a quote, which I have shared previously, by Banksy, a British street artist and activist:

"... they say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time."

A quote similar to Banksy's is by Irvin Yalom, an emeritus professor at Stanford University. He shares:

"Someday soon, perhaps in 40 years, there will be no one alive who has ever known me. That's when I will be truly dead—when I exist in no one's memory. I thought a lot about how someone very old is the last living individual to have known some person or cluster of people. When that person dies, the whole cluster dies, too, and vanishes from the living."

These two quotes have had a profound impact on me and how I now accept a greater significance of peoples' names—especially post-death. These quotes identify the essential need for us to keep the Midwest Buddhist Temple Sangha cluster active and former Sangha members' names from not being said for the last time.

Through sharing the names, the Sangha is honoring each person, as Banksy identifies, and that they are acknowledged as part of the MBT cluster, as Yalom shares.

It is important for our Dharma School students to attend the memorial services. Through the memorial services, the Dharma School students learn different aspects about life and death; they participate in an honored ritual, and they hear many names—some that they may recognize.

Most importantly, they are experiencing and practicing gratitude while learning, by sharing respect to ancestors, and by celebrating their MBT Sangha cluster.

## Challenges

When I am facing some kind of challenge, I compare it to my challenge driving the roads in southwest Ohio, and I sometimes compare myself to "The Little Engine That Could."

Much of my life, I have been influenced by this book written by Watty Piper, and how that Little Engine was challenged. The Little Engine agreed to help an engine carrying toys for the children that had broken down. However, to do so, she would need to climb a high mountain—something not on

her usual path.

At first, she encourages herself by chanting, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can."

As she gets higher up the mountain and needs to go even higher, she chants, "I can do it, I can do it, I can do it." When she finally gets to the top of the mountain to where she needed to deliver the toys, she chants, "I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could."

Over the decades, I have modeled my determination, when challenged, after the Little Engine and her chants.

However, over the last several years, I have read many Buddhist books, been to conferences, listened to many Dharma talks learning about the Buddha's and Shinran's teachings, our sutras and, especially, the Nembutsu.

Such teachings have provided me new chants, like Namu Amida Butsu, that have joined the words of encouragement of The Little Engine.

Again, I am reminded of Rev. Unno when he shares, "Awakening is dynamic, constantly evolving in accordance with life's realities."

The Little Engine faced her reality and successfully climbed the mountain as she became awakened. Her chants, the Nembutsu, and other Buddhists chants now provide me the assurance I need when encountering challenges.

## Rev. Ron support

As we live our daily lives, it is hard not to think of death, whether thinking of our lives or the lives of people we know or even someone known globally. Each of us, in some way, has known a relative or a friend or an acquaintance who has died. Sometimes we learn more about them after their death than while they were living—possibly challenges they faced or how they may have suffered and/or achieved.

Sometimes, I need a little extra support shaping my life realities, and I need to lean on someone. Sometimes I lean on Rev. Ron.

Back in October 2020, during a Wednesday evening class, Rev. Ron led a discussion regarding living. I can't remember much about the discussion now, but I remember I had a philosophical and emotional reflection that intrigued me so much I needed to email Rev. Ron later in the evening after the class. I asked him, "Why do we live?"

With Rev. Ron's understanding of the Dharma, he replied: "Because we were born."

*see living, page 13*

## living

*Continued from page 12*

I liked his response because it was so simple and to the point. But he also said that he thought my question was an odd question.

I was surprised when he referred to my question as an “odd question.” I just assumed that most others wondered why we live. I have thought about it on and off for much of my life.

Regardless of whether it was an odd question or not, I now had an answer to my question. “Why do we live?” Because “we were born.”

His response triggered a reflection of “Why I was born?”

I once learned in a class or a Dharma Talk that the probability to be born is minimal. Biologically, something like 1 in 400 trillion—which confirms, “How rare and wondrous it is to have been born into human life and now I live it.”

Because we are born into this world, we are now living life. So now what? How do we choose to live our lives? How do we choose to live our lives by the teachings of the Dharma as an artist, farmer, professor, teacher, carpenter, dentist, minister or whatever profession or lifestyle.

We are familiar with the first of The Four Nobel Truths—that life is suffering. Reflecting on “life is suffering,” I pondered even more ... were we born in this life to suffer? Why would I choose to live my life and to embrace each moment knowing I and others will experience pain and suffering?

But then I am reminded that the Buddha said, “Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional. The choice is entirely ours; it’s as simple as that.”

So, I guess I choose my sufferings. When I face challenges like the hilly roads in southwest Ohio, it is up to me if I suffer.

So now, I have learned to put my trust in my driving, others’ driving, accept my path and move forward, as I chant the Nembutsu and put my trust in Amitabha.

Yet, another Unno quote reminds me that, “Pure Land Buddhism might suggest another worldly orientation, but its primary focus is on the here and now.”

Because death is imminent, Unno and also Rev. Ron has shared the importance to embrace that each moment in life is precious, and we need to cherish each moment and to embrace the here and now. As I have shared before I wear a wristband that advocates “Cherish each Moment.”

When I was a young woman in the late 1960s, there was popular saying “Have a beautiful day.” During that time, I decided that I would have “Have a beautiful day” put on my tombstone, alongside several generations of my family tombstones.

However, in the last few years, I have changed my mind. I have now decided my tombstone will read “Cherish each moment.”

### **Where do we come from**

I must share a memory that came to mind while writing this Dharma talk. It’s connected to being born and where we come from.

We used to live in New York City. One day when Omni and I came home from playing in the Central Park—Omni was maybe 3 or 4 years old at the time—we were in the kitchen and, out of the blue, Omni asked, “Mommy, where did I come from?”

I paused and thought for a moment, because I didn’t expect this question for a few more years. I thought to myself: “What am I going to say?”

After a brief reflection, I shared a very brief description of where we come from and how we are born. A little frustrated, Omni said, “No, Mom, where do we come from—Queens, Brooklyn or Manhattan?”

So being born into this world and where we come from have many interpretations and a variety of experiences.

### **Heartbeat away**

A few of you know that back in September 2021, I was attacked by a pit bull. Not fun and obviously a scary time. It would have been more life-threatening had there not been an alley guardrail between me and the dog.

The heartbeat of my life flashed before me at that time and even sometimes as a reflection during my healing. I had heard Rev. Ron talk about life and death as being only a heartbeat away, but I never took it real intimately.

The day of the attack was the day after Tsune Nakagawa, a former MBT member, had died. My understanding is that she went to the hospital with something that didn’t appear to be too serious and unexpectedly died. She was a heartbeat away.

I pondered whether her death was a gift, but I know she didn’t want to suffer, and she died like she lived, gracefully.

When the anesthesiologist was putting me under for my surgery, I couldn’t help but think of Tsune. I looked at the ceiling chanting the Nembutsu repeatedly while seeing her face. Tsune had just died just a few hours ago and now she was already working as guardian angel for me. Saying the Nembutsu while seeing Tsune’s face provided me the comfort I needed at my heartbeat away from death moment.

### **September 2021 class**

A couple of weeks after the dog attack and, again, after one of Rev. Ron’s Wednesday night classes, I was experiencing some anxiety. So, I reached out to him again after class.

I emailed Rev. Ron, sharing that I appreciated his discussion that “life is a heartbeat away” and how the possibility of the reality of my death became apparent. I came to a deeper understanding that death’s reality is, yes, a heartbeat away and omnipresent.

I continued in my email that I can sometimes be pretty good at calming myself down but, right now, I could use some help and asked, “Are there any Buddhist ideas to help me accept such a reality?”

In his reply, Rev. Ron reminded me again “... that death is always just a heartbeat away ... so we need to embrace it and not run away from it. And by embracing both life and death, we can be free of the fear of both life and death ... so each new breath is a gift ... and we should embrace it also.”

Rev. Ron then shared that one of his professors had referenced Enlightenment and Shinjin as “Perfect Freedom.” Although his professor never told Rev. Ron exactly what Perfect Freedom meant, his understanding of it was “... we experience our Perfect Freedom when we are free from our own limitations, fears, attachments, etc.”

I pondered overnight and again the next morning about our email conversation on Perfect Freedom and still had some questions. So I reached out to Rev. Ron again. I asked him a multilayered question. “If your professor said we need to give up on ‘controlling our own life,’ does he also mean we need to ‘give up on controlling our death?’”

And if we experience a fear and we face that fear, do we learn to respect that fear in the future? And does that fear then enhance our lives? But if we never face our daily life fears, we don’t deepen our understanding of life?”

Rev. Ron replied, “You are right on.” I replied that what he had shared was exactly what I needed, and I guess I needed what happened to me to help me embrace and welcome my Perfect Freedom and to give me the courage “to let go” and to be even more welcoming of Amida. I came to the conclusion that even though I was close to death at the time of the dog attack, when push comes to shove, it was no big deal since each day each of us is close to death and we should not fear it.

I told Rev. Ron I was happy that I wrote him even though it is not something I would normally do. But I needed to and, now, I will try to let go and embrace each moment and to learn to “let go.” I am so grateful that Rev. Ron has been there to listen to and field my concerns and questions as I know he is there for others as well.

We have had the pleasure to have Rev.

*see living, page 14*

## living

*Continued from page 13*

Bob Oshita give a couple Zoom Dharma talks the last two weeks—one substituting for his wife Rev. Patti Oshita.

I had recently learned that the Buddhist Church of Sacramento had been vandalized with graffiti on Feb. 20, a few days prior to their speaking. Both Revs. Bob and Patti were leaders for 32 years at BCS.

I did brief online research regarding the vandalization. Other than emotionally recovering from the horrific situation and cleaning the graffiti, they and the Sangha are OK. There is a beautiful message on the temple website by the current BCS sensei, Rev. Yuki Sugahara, and other information regarding the vandalism is also available.

In some ways the BCS vandalism brings greater focus to the messages that both Revs. Bob and Patti shared with us. In his talk, Rev. Bob shared many things, but I will briefly identify how he encouraged us to wake up and remember this is our one and only life; each day is a gift don't waste it.

He reminded us that nothing is forever and not to take out life for granted. And he asked us how much is one hour of our life worth? How much is one day of our life worth? Rev. Bob is such a proponent for embracing life with grace and gratitude.

I had never thought about putting a financial value on my life. But the thought does provide an interesting perspective.

The following week, in her talk, Rev. Patti provided an interesting parallel to living our lives to rules of the various games being played at the recent Olympics. She asked us to remember that our lives are not defined by time periods like within an athletic game. And, in life, we don't know when our game is over. She identified that we need to play each day as the best day/ game of our lives because we may be in the fourth quarter of our lives, and it is

important to value each moment.

Rev Patti cleverly referenced Buddha as "Coach Buddha," a timely analogy, because of the recent Olympic Games.

Revs. Bob and Patti's perspectives reminded me of what Rev. Unno shared. That "no human life should be wasted, abandoned or forgotten but should be transformed into a source of vibrant life, deep wisdom and compassionate living"

If we live our lives as encouraged by Revs. Bob and Patti and Rev. Unno, not only will we live a purposeful life, but we may be celebrated and remembered through our contributions. And our names may be heard in future MBT memorial services.

### Walk for Peace

I am reminded of the recent Walk for Peace—when 24 monks, with their dog, Aloka, walked 2,300 miles from their center in Fort Worth, Texas, to Washinton, D.C. A 110-day pilgrimage.

In silence, each of their steps was dedicated to raise awareness toward hope, peace, loving-kindness, harmony, love and compassion.

Even though their Walk for Peace is completed, each of us can take our physical and spiritual daily steps along our life paths dedicated to gratitude and loving compassion in our own lives and the lives of others.

Let us all walk together on our daily life paths toward enlightenment as a common cluster of MBT peacemakers. We can try to live a life shared as Venerable Pannakara, the monk who led the Walk for Peace, advocated: "Peace already abides within each of us, and happiness is already present within us. We have simply forgotten. This present moment is the time to awaken peace and happiness once again."

### Conclusion

Yes, hard it is to be born into this world, but I can't help wondering if it is harder to die than to be born? I am pretty sure I will find out some day,

Our memorial services celebrate our Jodo Shinshu ancestors and friends who have traveled their life paths and continue to guide us into the future by having passed on the sutras, traditions, the teachings, and to encourage us to continue to pay it forward with gratitude and compassion.

Individually and as a Sangha, we can walk an awakened peaceful life path by practicing what Coach Buddha, and our coaches— Revs. Ron, Bob, Patti, Unno, the Venerable Pannakara, and the Dali Lama—shared:

1. Death is a heartbeat away.
2. We are born to live this life.
3. Each breath is a gift.
4. The Dharma is everywhere.
5. Cherish each moment.
6. Wake up, this is our one and only life.
7. Nothing is forever, don't take things for granted.
8. Saying the Nembustu brings comfort.
9. Peace and happiness already abides within each of us and present within us.
10. Our awakening is dynamic and evolves within our life realities.
11. By embracing both life and death, we can be free.
12. Rejoice in the moment.
13. Be free of our own limitations, fears and attachments.
14. We can all walk in peace—together or alone—for the rest of our lives.
15. To embrace the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Please put your hands together in Gassho:

The Dali lama reminds us:  
*We are visitors on this planet.  
We are here for 90 or 100 years at the very most.  
During that period, we must try to do something good  
Something useful with their lives.  
If you contribute to other peoples' happiness  
You will find the true goal  
The true meaning of life.*

*Namu Amida Butsu*

## buddhist women's association

# General meeting set for April 26

By Jeanne Toguri

As we welcome spring, let's celebrate the joy of life and Buddha's birth at our Hanamatsuri (Flower Festival). Take the time to enjoy the weather and all the budding of new growth outside, as well as the beautiful colors the season brings.

**Reminder:** The MBT BWA General Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, April 26—right after service. It will be held in the in the Meeting Room on the east side of the temple.

Come meet our board officers and members and learn about our organization.

## Learning about MBT

After the Sunday service on March 22, about 30–40 people attended the first-ever MBT 101 event, hosted by temple office manager Taryn Hutt and several new volunteers.

Sangha members gathered in the Social Hall to learn more about temple history, operations, fundraising, volunteering and "who's who."

We also enjoyed many delicious treats and a raffle. Raffle winners included:

Allison Hagio and Michael Rowder (Buddhism books); Mary Miller (rainbow nenju and Niji Dharma bookmark); Arlene Suekama (80th Anniversary totebag and Buddha statue); and Tommy Yamashita ("Lost and Found" treasures).

We hope to host more inofmrative events with more specific, detailed information about these topics.

**MIDWEST BUDDHIST TEMPLE  
2026 PLEDGE DRIVE**

MBT welcomes everyone to become temple members, with no minimum pledge requirement. All MBT supporters are asked to give what they can financially, as well as their much appreciated time and effort. Donations can be made online at [mbtchicago.org/join-support/donate-now/](http://mbtchicago.org/join-support/donate-now/); look for the purple "Donate Now."

**DONATE NOW**

**What are the benefits of making a pledge?**

- Maintains the daily cost of operating the temple (salaries, utilities, maintenance, supplies)
- Supports our religious, social and community programs
- At the \$300 minimum, allows voting on key temple issues
- Receive our monthly Bulletin newsletter
- Provides membership in the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), including Wheel of Dharma newsletter
- Ensures the continued growth of the temple



**\$17,645**  
**18%**  
of goal  
as of  
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# domo

The Midwest Buddhist Temple gratefully acknowledges the following donations received between **Feb. 18 and March 12**.

Due to some delays in processing, you may see your donation acknowledgment in the next issue of the Bulletin. Please reach out to the office with any questions. Please notify the Bulletin or the MBT Office of any omissions or corrections.

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## April memorials

On the first Sunday of each month, the Midwest Buddhist Temple holds a collective Monthly Memorial Service during the regular Sunday Family Service, when loved ones can be remembered and honored.

Although memorial services are held in memory of a loved one who has passed away, the purpose of the memorial service is for us, the living, the ones who remain behind. The memorial service provides an opportunity to express appreciation and gratitude for the many benefits we have received from the person who passed away. These are the names of temple friends who have passed away in April, and who we will remember during the MBT service on April 5. To add a family member, please contact the MBT Office.

<b>April</b>		1999	Masaru Isshiki
1922	Hikoichi Miyata		Gerald C. Miyata
1924	Ai Isoda	2000	Mickey (Miuki) Fujii
1930	Kine Masai		Evalyn T. Cromwell
1931	Suekichi Tsuji		Rose T. Mukai
1935	Shigetaro Fujii	2004	Shigeyo Mizuno
1941	Sato Chikaraishi		Marlene Michi Nishimoto-Horowitz
1944	Kuhei Nakamoto	2005	
1946	Toichi Shishida		Doris Patton
	Hidokachi Kunisada	2006	Sue Shizuko Fujisawa
1957	Teiichi Ono		Yoshiwo Fujita
1959	Isao Fukui		Masaki Mizuki
1960	Hagino Mizuki	2007	Marjorie Fumiko Ota
1964	Yoshi Nishioka		Grayson Sumio Nakamoto
1966	Kiyoshi Tsusaki		Toshi Hieshima
1970	Fujie Kanameishi		Shane Guyton II
1972	Rev. Kenji Itahara	2008	Ayako Hamamoto
1973	Chizuru Oda		Janice Maekawa
1974	Nai Isono		Shunso Sera
1976	Harry Hideo Miyake	2010	Alexander Whybrow
		2011	Kazuichi Okigawa
1977	Itoyo Onishi		Jewel Miyoko Kanai
	Tomoyuki Saida		Mitsuo Kodama
1981	Sato Matsumoto		Grace Fusako Motooka
1982	Charles H. Takeshita	2012	Tsugi Ozaki
	Katsu Higashigawa	2013	Hiram Maekawa
1983	Tomio Morita		Yoshiko Sekiguchi
1985	Ayako Taniguchi	2014	Haruko Rose Tademaru
1986	Masao Bill Koyanagi	2016	Tomiko Salzman
		2019	Renee Blixt-Sheehan
1987	Kimi Umeki		Alejandro Acevedo
	Tamiko Matsushita		Keith Maekawa
1988	Koso Matsushima	2022	Timothy Miura
	Suzanne K. Weiss	2023	Alice Youko Maruyama
1991	Roy T. Sakaye		Martha Masako Taura
	Shizue Wakasa		Alvin Hayashi
1994	Jerry Okazaki	2025	
1995	Sumio Ikoma		
	Coolidge Tanino		
1996	Asao Frank Minato		
	Tom Kazuo Nakagawa		
1997	Setsuko Kobayashi		
	Hayano Oda		
1998	Jeff Masaru Sonoda		

## ohigan

*Continued from page 1*

for meditation and reflection. To center our lives and to be in balance and harmony with the world around us.

Of course, there is a story that goes with this holiday, and I would like to repeat my version of the story.

Ohigan refers to the Other Shore, the shore of Amida's Pure Land. This is the story of the Two Rivers and the White Path by Zendo Daishi or Shan-Tao, one of the Seven Masters selected by Shinran. And the story goes something like this:

There is a man walking in the desert. Soon, he is chased by wild beasts and hungry animals that want to kill him and eat him. So, he starts to run away from the wild beasts, who are soon joined by angry bandits who want to beat and rob him.

The man runs and runs, but the wild beasts and the angry bandits are gaining on him. Still, he continues to run.

Then he comes upon a strange river, with a narrow white path leading across the river. This river flows in both directions, with one side of the narrow white path having a river of fire on the right with fingers of flame coming up to the narrow white path. And on the left of the narrow white path, there is a river of water flowing on the left with huge waves lapping over the narrow white path.

It seems so dangerous.

The man is frozen with fear. Behind him are wild beasts and angry bandits, and in front of him is a raging river of fire and water.

To each side, the rivers seem to flow endlessly. He is frozen with fear and does not know what to do.

Then a voice calls out to him. It seems like the voice is in thin air. The voice says that he should start to walk on that narrow white path. The voice tells him to trust himself to not fall into the river of fire or the river of water.

It is the voice of Shakyamuni Buddha encouraging the man to start to walk on the narrow white path.

The man starts to take a few short steps, still not trusting his balance and still not sure what to do.

The wild beasts tell him, "Come back, it is dangerous. We will not harm you." And the angry bandits tell him, "Come back, it is dangerous. We mean you no harm."

The man is still frozen in place when another voice calls out to him from the other shore. It is the voice of Amida Buddha, telling him to have confidence in the narrow white path and come to the safety of the other shore.

The man, hears the second voice, and feeling assured, he takes a step across the narrow white path. And then another step. And soon he crosses the river of fire and the river of water and reaches the other shore of Ohigan.

Of course, this story has much symbolism.

Each of us is like that man walking in the desert. We come upon a problem that seems impossible, and we do not know what to do. We don't know which way to turn.

The hungry beasts symbolize our own selfish passions; the angry bandits symbolize our own angers and hatreds.

The river of fire symbolizes the dangers of our own blind passions, which can burn within ourselves; the river of water symbolizes our own selfishness, which can drown us.

The first voice is the voice of Shakyamuni Buddha giving us guidance to come to Buddhism and to trust the Teaching. The second voice is the voice of Amida reaching out to us to entrust in Amida's Wisdom and Compassion.

The other shore is the land of Amida's Pure Land, the land of peace and safety.

It is from this story that we have the phrase that I often repeat—"Come as you are." It is important to know that this is one of the first Buddhist stories in which the person does not accept the Buddha's teaching and become a disciple as monk or nun.

In this story, it is about an

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## ohigan

Continued from page 16

ordinary person finding  
Enlightenment of Amida

Buddha's Other Shore. It is an example of how one can be an ordinary person without discipline or great learning and still can reach the Other Shore of Ohigan.

The phrase "come as you are" has a second line, it is "and stay awhile"—which means to stay and to listen to the Dharma together with your fellow travelers for some period of time so that the Dharma can sink in. To stay awhile means to let the Dharma embrace each of us.

And, though it is not said, there is a third part of the phrase "Come as you are." What is usually left unsaid is: "Do not disturb the Harmony of the Sangha." When one disturbs the Harmony of the Sangha, they are asked to leave the Sangha.

Each of us has differences and each of us has to respect those differences. But when those differences boil out and cause friction and discord among the Sangha, it cannot be tolerated. This is to disturb the Harmony of the Sangha and must cease.

To me, I always found it interesting that wording like this was part of our ordination procedure. Let me share the literal translation of the



Tokudo Oath that all Hongwanji Ministers agree to:

*"I affirm that I will uphold the duties as a Buddhist minister for all of my life, never being neglectful of responsibilities to pursue knowledge and propagate the teachings.*

*"I promise that I will follow the order of our Master (Gomonshu), and with harmony as the main*

*principle, never causing disorder or trouble to occur in our religious institution.*

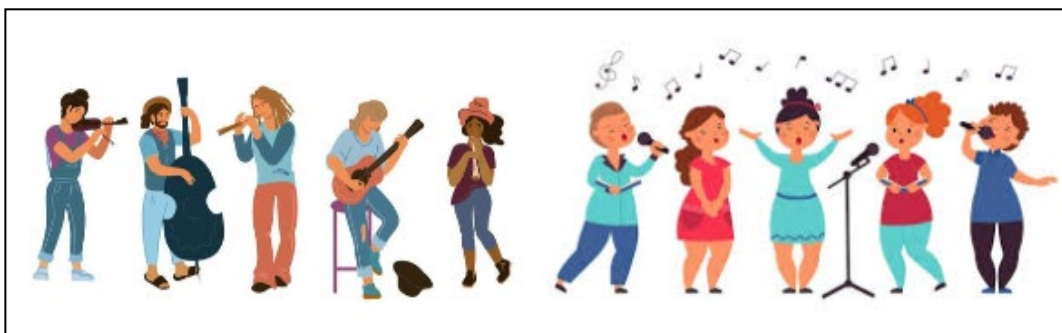
*"I shall exercise discretion in my speech and conduct and abide by [public] ethics and morals, never disgracing the honor of our religious institution."*

That middle paragraph, saying "never causing disorder or trouble to occur in our religious institution" really puts an

emphasis on the importance of Harmony within the whole Hongwanji system—from the headquarters in Kyoto down to the local Midwest Buddhist Temple.

So, as we celebrate Ohigan, let us remember to maintain the Harmony of the Sangha.

*Namu Amida Butsu – with gratitude and kindness beyond words*



## Musicians: Come join the MBT Band

By Joy Zavala

Calling all musicians and singers: The MBT Band is recruiting new members. If you play an instrument and/or would like to participate as

a singer, please sign up [here](#) or on the signup sheet on the MBT Bulletin Board in the Social Hall.

The MBT Band will perform in upcoming services and

events. Scheduling will be based on musician/singer availability.

So, if you would like to share your talents and be a part of the band, please sign up.

## Learn ways to volunteer at MBT

Are you interested in volunteer opportunities with the Midwest Buddhist Temple? If you are, just fill out this [form](#) and join the 2026 MBT Volunteer Mailing List. No commitment, just information!

We'll contact you when new volunteer opportunities are announced (new, fun projects in the works). We definitely appreciate your interest.

## save the dates

**APR 25** Join us for our Homeless Project sandwich-making day. This is a hybrid event with sandwiches either made at the temple or made at home and dropped off at the temple.

**Time:** Sandwich-making at noon; dropoffs of sandwiches made at home at 1 pm. **Location:** MBT. **More information:** Contact the MBT Office, 312.943.7801, if you would like to participate.

**APR 26** The Events Committee will sponsor an after-Sunday Service showing of the Japanese movie "Perfect Days" (2023; 2 hours and 5 minutes), directed by Wim Wenders. "Perfect Days" is a quiet drama following Hirayama (Koji Yakusho), a content cleaner of public toilets in Tokyo who finds beauty, routine and joy in a simple, analog life. Through his daily tasks, love for music/books, and quiet observations of nature, the film explores themes of mindfulness and finding happiness in the mundane.

**Time:** 11:45 am. **Cost:** Free (donations are welcomed). **Location:** MBT Social Hall. **RSVP:** Please sign up [here](#) or contact the MBT Office, 312.943.7801, if you will be attending.

## You can listen to Dharma talks on MBT's YouTube channel

We have moved our YouTube channel to a new location: [youtube.com/mbtchicago-youtube](https://youtube.com/mbtchicago-youtube).

Here you can view Dharma messages from the comfort of your home. We keep about 12 months of the latest videos online.

If you have any questions just drop us a note at [youtube.admin@mbtchicago.org](mailto:admin@mbtchicago.org). So check out our channel and become a subscriber by clicking the "Subscribe" button.



If you hit the bell icon, you will be notified when we post new content.

# APR

at midwest buddhist temple

## 5

SUNDAY

10:30 am Monthly Memorial Service / Rev. Ron Miyamura

## 12

SUNDAY

10:30 am Hanamatsuri Service / Rev. Ron Miyamura

## 19

SUNDAY

10:30 am Family Service / Andrew Rowland

## 25

SATURDAY

Noon/1 pm Homeless Project Sandwich-Making (*see details at left*)

## 26

SUNDAY

10:30 am Eshinni/Kakushinni Service / Cynthia Mee

