



Shoseien 涉成園

Interdependence

Sometimes, when we manage to accomplish something, we think “Wow, I was able to do this without asking somebody for help. Nobody had to support me. I did this all by myself.” But is this true? Did we really achieve this by ourselves?

For example, when we graduate from college, we undoubtedly accomplished something great. We had to put a lot of effort into it. Nobody else could have done the studying for us. We had to do all the learning. We had to spend so many hours in the library and we had to write all our papers ourselves.

But what exactly enabled us to do all this? If we think a little bit further we realize that it was also thanks to our teachers, who patiently taught us, read our papers and graded our tests. It was also thanks to our parents, who supported us and helped us with our homework back

in school. It is also thanks to our fellow students who accompanied us and also thanks to society who helped to finance the educational institutions. As we can see, in reality our achievement of graduating college is also thanks to all those people.

We can even go a little further and think about more fundamental things. All of our activities depend to a certain extent on our physical bodies, which depend on the nutrition we receive from the food we eat. We eat animals and plants that are grown on farms, processed somewhere else and then transported to the supermarket around the corner. The animals we eat need food themselves and the plants need water and sunshine. We could endlessly continue this chain.

Nothing comes out of nowhere. Everything comes into existence through

various causes and conditions. In Buddhism, we call this interdependent origination. Everything is connected.

The same is true for our spiritual growth. We have to put effort into it by listening to the Buddhist teachings and sincerely reflecting upon them, but our own power is not enough to enable true spiritual growth. The causes and conditions that nurture and enable our spiritual growth is what we call Amida Buddha’s “other power.”

Realizing this, we entrust ourselves to this other power and say *Namu Amida Butsu* (I take refuge in Amida Buddha) in thankfulness.

It is good to be proud of our own accomplishments, but we should also be thankful for all the various conditions that enabled us to achieve them in the first place.

(Thomas Siebert)



“The enemy bewildering And misleading me, Lies within.”

— Yasuda Rijin, modern philosopher

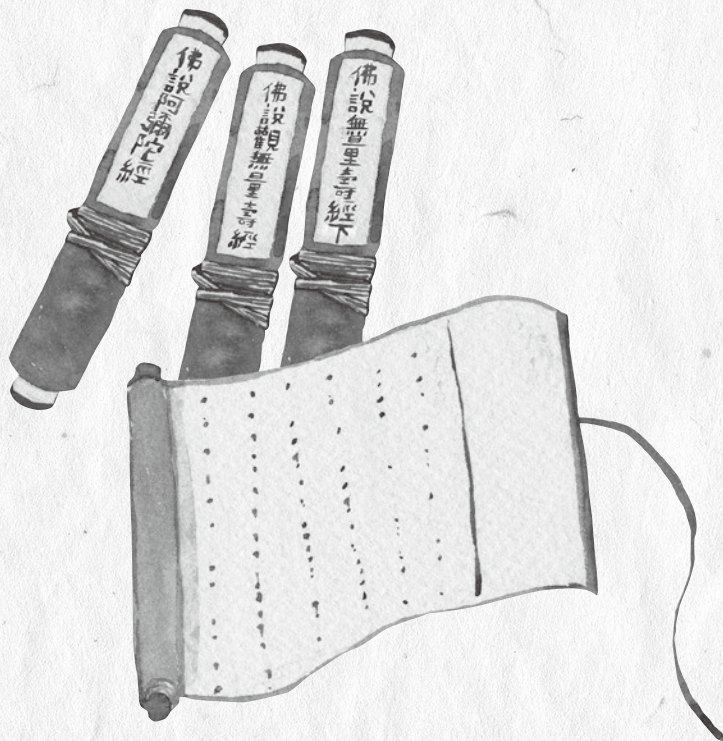
When people face troublesome events, they sometimes shift the fault onto their surroundings or, on the contrary, only blame themselves. This reprimanding mind, or the mind entrapped in assuming that only ourselves have problems, deepens furthermore our distress and gives birth to much confusion in our lives. How-

ever, Śākyamuni Buddha shed light on the principle of cause and effect, namely, that the rights and wrongs of something vary according to the conditions.

It also sometimes certainly feels like even things that were inconvenient for ourselves happen to have been, looking back retrospectively, rather posi-

tive. If we can observe calmly the problems laying right in front of our eyes through the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha, would not we be also able to perceive our own prejudices and assumptions, and come to open up a brand new life?

(Minami Midō, February 2015. Osaka: Shinshū Ōtani-ha Nanba Betsuin)



Sutras

It seems like a variety of sutras are recited at Buddhist temples' services. Please tell me about them.

“Sutras” are texts containing the teachings preached by Śākyamuni Buddha. After he passed away, his disciples came together and repeatedly checked with each other that their memories of his teachings were not mistaken. Then, these disciples wrote these teachings down as sutras for future generations. In other words, sutras are the words of Śākyamuni Buddha.

While sutras are read at funerals and memorial services, this does not mean that they are incantations for consoling the deceased, much less

something recited in order to make one's wishes come true.

As the great Chinese teacher Shandao said, “Sutras are mirrors that reflect the self.” They are for understanding ourselves in light of their teachings and truth. Sutras are recited so that we become people who listen to the awakened words of Śākyamuni Buddha, encounter his teachings, examine how we live, and similarly awaken to truth.

Shin Buddhism attaches particular importance to three sutras that teach the so-called “nenbutsu of the Original

Vow”: the Sutra of Immeasurable Life, Contemplation Sutra, and Amida Sutra. They are collectively referred to as the Three Pure Land Sutras. At Higashi Honganji, twice a day the sutras are recited as part of the Shinshu Honbyō Shūkotsu (once in the morning and once in the afternoon), for which followers from around Japan gather to have the ashes of deceased individuals interred in the Founder's Hall.

Higashi Honganji's Tsukigane: One of Japan's Largest Temple Bells

Did you know that Higashi Honganji has one of largest temple bells in Japan? With a height of 256 cm, diameter of 156 cm, and a total weight of 3800 kg, it is the fifth largest temple bell in Japan made before 1600s. Rennyō Shōnin had it cast in the 9th month of Keichō 9 (1604) when the Founder's Hall was being built. On the middle section of the bell's side one finds a heavenly being from India and a Chinese phoenix. On the pointed area in its lower section there is a lotus flower design, below which is an arabesque pattern.

While the bell has been through four fires, it survived all of them. It has been designated as a treasure of the Ōtani school, and is on display next to the shopping area on the temple's grounds, sharing with visitors the history of the founding of Higashi Honganji.

Currently in the bell tower that is located in the southeast part of the temple's grounds there is a bell that was newly made in 2010 (which is in this picture)—the first time this had been done at our temple in approximately 400 years. Its design is based on the original bell discussed above. Today this new bell is rung one hour before morning service and other events.