



聞·門 ———
Hearing and Gate



Cherry Blossoms 桜

For Better or Worse

What does it mean to be happy? The common understanding is that happiness means feeling good for some reason. But now we need to ask again: What kind of reason? What actually makes us feel good? If we give it some thought, most of us will probably agree that good feeling arises when things go our way – when the world responds positively to our wishes and actions. In other words, we are happy when we succeed.

That is certainly a valid part of how we understand happiness. But it also has a flip side: If our happiness depends on success, it means that there can be no good feeling when we fail. To succeed is to be happy, to fail is to be unhappy. But life is full of things that don't go our way, and even those that do, seldom succeed in a complete way. Does it mean that we are doomed to spend most of

our time in some kind of unhappiness?

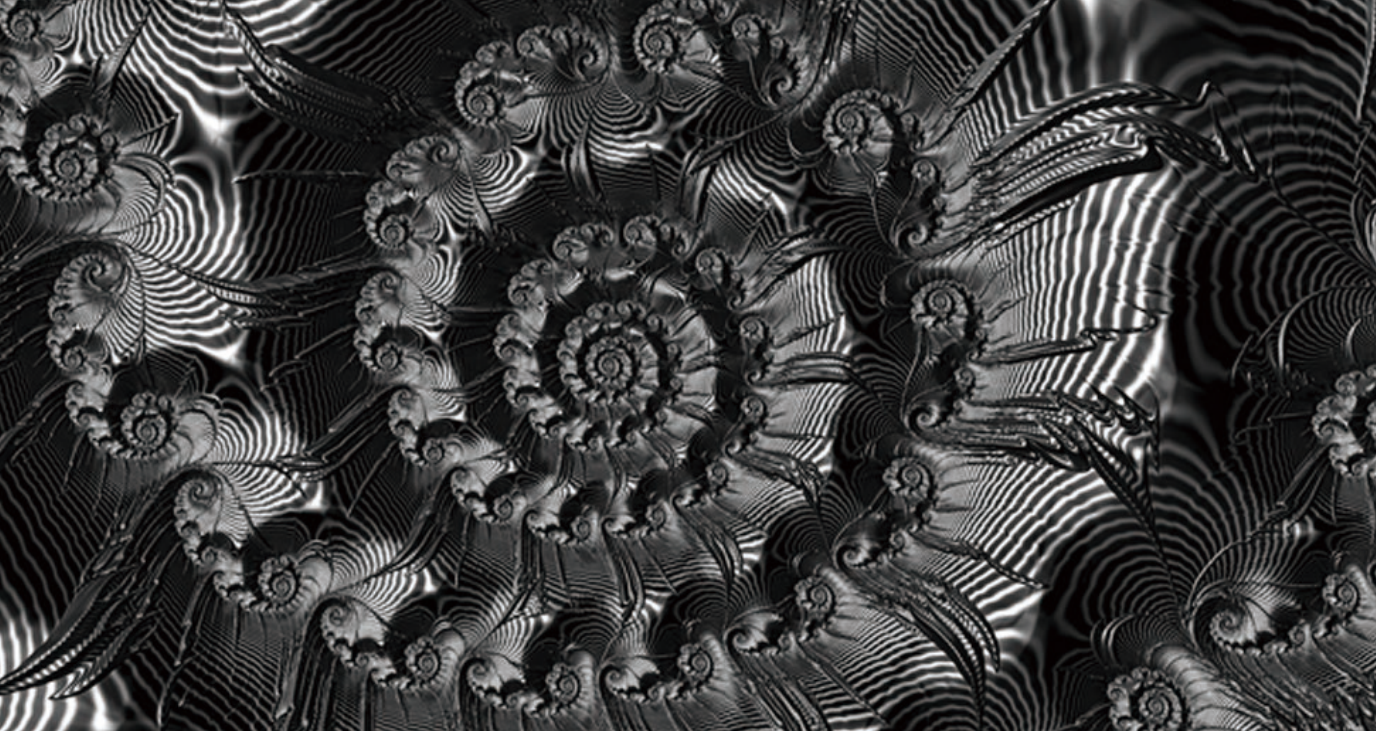
As long as we understand happiness as depending on external things, the answer to that must be yes. But luckily, feeling happiness doesn't have to be constrained by this limited definition. It can be something larger than merely reacting to events according to the degree to which they seem to benefit us.

The things that happen in the world don't take place in isolation. They are interconnected—influencing, changing, and creating one another in an infinite number of ways. Buddhism calls this interconnectedness of all things “dependent arising.” Since we have no way of knowing all the possible effects and ramifications of any single event, it often becomes impossible to tell in real time whether an event is in fact good or bad. Something that makes us unhappy can lead to happy things later on; something that feels good

now can end up being a cause for regret, or may itself be the positive result of past misfortunes.

Yes, some things are unquestionable disasters while others are unquestionable blessings—but most are neither. How we classify them and react to them depends on the larger context, which takes time to know and appreciate. But one thing is certain: what feels pleasant is closely linked to what feels unpleasant. Success can lead to failure, and failure can give birth to success. This means that we should start looking more favorably at bad things, and perhaps, less enthusiastically at good things. And above all, to find stable happiness, we need to look elsewhere—into our own soul.

(Dan Bornstein)



Leaves of Scripture

Endless Worries

A recent survey of young mothers and fathers published in a magazine found that they wanted money, houses, and cars. Of course, these are among the necessities of modern life. But does more money lead to more happiness or make our worries go away? We often hear news of people killing each other over money. And while people

think owning a house will lead to a carefree, worry-free life, owning a house comes with its own set of worries in the form of loans, fires, burglaries, and so on. Money, houses, and cars. We are worried if we have them, and worried if we don't. What are we to do in this situation? Buddhism has made it clear that attachment to

such things is at the very root of our suffering. While we may think having things leads to happiness and it is unhappy to not have them, Buddhism teaches that attachment to either state controls us and causes us to suffer.

The Sutra of Infinite Life

The Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life, also known as the Sutra of Immeasurable Life and the Longer Sukhāvāṭīvyūha, is one of the three Pure Land sutras, along with the Contemplation Sutra (Sutra on the Meditation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life) and the Amida Sutra (Shorter Sukhāvāṭīvyūha). Set as a discussion between Śākyamuni Buddha, Ānanda, and Maitreya, it first explains how Hōzō Bodhisattva made forty-eight vows regarding his future Pure Land and its inhabitants, and then engaged in “inconceivable millions of long cosmic ages” of practices, after which

he became Amida Buddha and his Pure Land a reality. The best known of Hōzō Bodhisattva's vows is the eighteenth, which states that sentient beings will be able to be reborn in the Pure Land through the nenbutsu. This land is said to be a place of bliss in the West filled with various kinds of jewel trees (such as ones with “roots made of lapis-lazuli, trunks of crystal, branches of coral, boughs of agate, leaves of mother-of-pearl, flowers of purple gold, and fruits of white silver”), “ten thousand varieties of spontaneous music,” as well as ponds, with water “most sweet to taste, like ambrosia.” English transla-

tions of this sutra can be found in Luis O. Gomez's *The Land of Bliss* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), from which the above quotations were taken. (Cited from Inagaki, Hisao, 1984. *A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms*. Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, p. 215; and *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. “無量壽經 Sutra of Immeasurable Life,” accessed 23 March 2017, <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/x-pr-ddb.pl?q=%E7%84%A1%E9%87%8F%E5%A3%BD%E7%B6%93>)



Things Worth Knowing about Shin Buddhism

Kikyōshiki

Question: Inside the main hall, I saw one of the priests standing behind a follower, performing some kind of ceremony, during which he touches the followers head with a razor. What kind of ceremony is this?

Answer: This ceremony is called kikyōshiki.

Kikyōshiki is a ceremony, in which one takes refuge in the Buddha's teaching, leaving the self-centered lifestyle behind. In other words, it is a

ceremony, in which one vows to become a disciple of the Buddha. During this ceremony, one recites the "threefold refuge." Threefold refuge means taking refuge in the "three treasure," the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. The Buddha is the person who attained perfect awakening, his teaching is the dharma, and the community that follows this teachings is the sangha. One vows to make these three treasures the center of one's

everyday life. The head is not really shaven, but the priest touches the followers head three times with the razor to symbolically shave it. "I want to win against others," "I want to be famous and powerful," "I want to become rich," these thoughts are also called "the three queues." The priest touches the followers head three times to cut away these thoughts.

Question: What is hōmyō?

Answer: Hōmyō is the Buddhist name one receives during kikyōshiki. Usually, this name consists of three Chinese characters. The first character is always the same. It is the first character of Śākyamuni, the historical Buddha's name, when written in Chinese. In Japanese, this character is read as "shaku," therefore every hōmyō begins with shaku at its beginning. We receive our names from our parents, but our Buddhist name is a name we receive, when we become a disciple of the Buddha.

Question: Where does kikyōshiki take place?

Answer: At Higashi Honganji, the head temple of our denomination, the Shinshū Ōtani-ha, and at all affiliated temples.

Question: What are the people, who participate kikyōshiki, wearing around their shoulders?

Answer. This is called ryaku kataginu in Japanese. It is a ceremonial accessory that followers put around their shoulders, when they worship the Buddha to show respect.

Goeidō-mon

If you walk down Karasuma Street in Kyoto, you can find a big gate that welcomes the visitors of Higashi Honganji. This gate is called Goeidō-mon, sometimes also Daimon or Sanmon. With its two roofs and its height of about 28m, it is one of the “Three Big Gates of Kyoto.” Together with the other two big gates of Kyoto (the gates of the temples Chion-in and Nanzenji) and the gate Minami Daimon of the Tōdaiji in Nara, it is one of the tallest temple gates in Japan, but because it is comparatively narrow, it sometimes fails to make this impression.

On the gate, there is a sign which read Shinshū Honbyō (Shinshū Mausoleum). The reason for this is, that this temple started as the mausoleum for the founder of our school, Shinran Shōnin. Now it is a place to listen to his teachings. On the left and right of the gate are two smaller buildings, called sanrō, which house the stairs that lead to the top of the gate. From there, you have a great view at the mountains of Higashiyama in the east, and on the large roofs of Higashi Honganji’s main halls. Inside of the gate, three statues of Śākyamuni Buddha, Ananda, and Maitreya Bodhisattva are enshrined. This is a representation of the scene of the Longer Sukhāvāṭivūha Sutra, in which Śākyamuni teaches Ananda, Maitreya Bodhisattva, and others, about Amida Buddha and his vow to bring all beings into his Pure Land, if they only call his name with an entrusting mind.

The gate’s current appearance was determined in the year 1739, when also the position of the main halls and the layout of the temple grounds were decided. The temple burnt down four times after this, but was rebuilt every time. The reconstruction of the Goeidō-mon always marked the end of this great effort. The last reconstruction of the gate took place in 1911, sixteen years after the two main halls were rebuilt, using wood from all over the country.

