

## New Year Dharma Message

Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

A Happy New Year!

This is my 25th year of service to the Buddhist Churches of America, and my 16th year with New York Buddhist Church. It is amazing how fast time has flown. So many people have helped me during the last twenty-five years, and it is thanks to their kind support, I have been able to accomplish many things. I hope perhaps in the next 25 years my work can continue and I can repay my debt of gratitude.

I have been blessed with so many rich experiences as a Buddhist minister in this country. These experiences were not always easy. Those who have lived in other country know how challenging it is to live in a foreign culture. But those challenges have served as a fertilizer for my life and provided valuable lessons that blossom into benefits. My gratitude for all my diverse experiences inspires me to continue to give back to my community.

As I enter the beginning of my next chapter as a BCA minister, I would like to share with you my vision as resident minister of the New York Buddhist Church. My fundamental goal is to make our Buddhist temple a Dharma-centered refuge of compassion for those who wish to pursue the Nembutsu path and learn and practice the Buddha-Dharma. I believe as a Buddhist Sangha we should respect each other and acknowledge our differences and uniqueness. We need to respect our own Japanese Buddhist cultural heritage, and also continue to develop our tradition of American Jodoshinshu Buddhism. I would like to maintain the flame of the spirit of the Buddha-Dharma in New York, first lit by the Rev. Hozen Seki and his supporters in 1938, and keep it alive so that our temple members and the world may benefit from it.

As I mentioned in a previous newsletter, our temple has a special responsibility for spreading the message of "peace." This is because the statue of Shinran Shonin which survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima stands outside our temple. Nishi Hongwanji in Kyoto, Japan will observe the 750th Memorial Service of Shinran Shonin under the theme, "Let there be peace in the world; Let the Dharma spread." The statue in front of our temple carries the same message. Therefore, I would like to see this temple become a place that promotes peace education and peace activities, based upon the compassion and ahimsa (non-violence) that the Buddha and Shinran Shonin emphasized.

We all need to grow together and overcome various challenges such as declining membership, maintaining financial stability, and the aging of our members. One of the great strengths of our temple sangha, I believe, is its ethnic diversity. We are not only Japanese-American and Japanese, but also black, white, and Asian American. If we all work together, I am confident that we have a great potential to grow.

Socho Koshin Ogui said when performing the wedding for myself and my wife Heather in September 2009: "oneness does not mean to become the same, but oneness is to recognize differences and respect differences. Each has their own uniqueness and differences, and yet together they can create a great harmony with mutual-respect and mutual-understanding." It is like an orchestra with various different instruments. A Sangha should be a harmonious orchestra.

Let us begin to practice and create a great harmony together!

In Gassho,

T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, Rev. 