



# The Aspect of Self-Reflection

by Ken Yamaguchi

As I think back to my early days, back to the time of my birth, I ask myself the question, "What went on in my mind, what were the thoughts that constituted my actions?"

Try as I might, the only thing that I can conclude is that curiosity about the things around me, outside of this entity called my self, was uppermost in my mind. I learned from exposure and touch what things to incorporate into my life; what things to make my own and what things to avoid. All these things were decided from the standpoint of how beneficial they were for my own self. It was all "take, take, take."

The Buddha and His Teachings emphasize that life is a series of expansions; man's development is an expansion of an unending series of experiences, that, when related with one another, become meaningful to my own life, eventually leading toward the ultimate understanding that all of life is one, inseparable.

Ever since I entered the field of the ministry, which has been only for the past six years, I have found myself being invited to many dinner gatherings of one kind or another, meetings, recognition banquets, potlucks, etc., and I have gained some thirty pounds during this period. My wife is always "hounding" me about cutting down on my eating. I know that the advice is for my own good, and I know that I should take the advice very seriously and sincerely; however, at the same time, I keep thinking of and making all kinds of excuses about not being able to stay on a strict diet. I know that I *must* attend most of these gatherings, I know that I cannot offend the cook by not partaking of the food; therefore, what I should do is partake of the food in very limited amounts.

However, it is very difficult to change habits so readily, especially the kinds of habits one has built up during the course of a lifetime; habits like "SOMATSU NI SHITE WA IKENAI" (one must not be wasteful), scooping habits that really require smaller serving spoons in order not to scoop up too much food, and judgments about what is just the right amount of food, etc. Also, justifying remarks such as, "Oh, I can go back on my diet tomorrow," or "This food isn't fattening," make it so easy to violate the precept of "Don't overdo anything to the point of harm to the body." There is a saying, "It's all right to go fishing, but don't get fished," and again, "It's all right to drink but don't get drunk," and I suppose it could also be said, "It's all right to put 'stuff' in your stomach but don't get stuffed." However, the conflict between what I shouldn't do and what I can't

help but do is such that it almost always creates dire consequences.

In the latter part of my life and up to now, I have been in the process of trying to resolve my life and its problems (in other words, trying to seek enlightenment), trying to entertain deep thoughts of self-reflection, trying to look into myself, as suggested by the Buddha, to try to see what it is that makes me "tick" the way I do, how my actions relate with the people and things around me. But try as I might, I find myself trying harder and harder to justify all my actions, while realizing more and more that this is doing nothing but hiding my shortcomings from others, and worse, from myself.

For many years I have been approached by individuals who have basically little or no knowledge or understanding of Buddhism, and who have sought for various reasons and explanations of the Teachings of the Buddha. There have been some people who have become estranged from their own religious upbringing, and who are "floundering in the dark" trying to resolve their lives. There have been some who have wondered why there had to be any other religious teaching outside of their own beliefs, and have made attempts to make comparisons and contrasts in order to show the superiority of their own beliefs. In the process of trying to explain the essence of my own belief, I even find myself doing the same thing of trying to point out the "superiority" of "my" Teaching.

I have come to a general conclusion that it is not for me to try to convince others of the "superiority" of my religious beliefs, but more important, that, for me, this is the only path that I can take for my salvation. My own "make up," my own condition (physical, mental, psychological, and philosophical) is such that I have no recourse but to place myself totally in the embrace of Amida Buddha, just as was the case for Shinran Shonin. Knowing this, why is it that I continue to get disturbed by people who attempt to "knock other people and their beliefs?"

Oh, what a pitiful self I am who understands that I am totally dependent upon the Wisdom and Compassion of the Buddha, but yet cannot let loose of that ego that keeps building up stronger and stronger!!

The more I reflect upon my self, the more I discover the truth about my self and I become more and more conscious of my real helpless state. At the same time I become more and more aware of the Great Compassionate Vow of Amida Buddha (DAI HON GWAN). NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.