



## The Buddhist Temple of Chicago

# February 2024

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## In Remembrance of a Friend Past and Yet Present

by Rev. Frederick Brenion

As the second week of January began, I received word that my dear friend, Rev. Paul Imahara had passed away on January 7th. He had an advanced state of cancer and was 'progressively getting weaker.' He was residing in Las Vegas, Nevada where much of his family lives.

Rev. Paul and his good wife, Kazuko, were members for many years at our West Covina Temple. Kazuko passed away in January of 2007. Rev. Paul had earlier sought and received ordination, Tokudo and Kyoshi. Our first 'home-grown' minister from West Covina! He gave numerous talks at our temples and was stationed at the Betsuin for a period of time. Later he retired to Las Vegas where he kept up involvement with Buddhist inquirers and had many a Sangha session in his home! He and Kazuko had three children and many grandchildren. In the midst of his last illness, Rev. Paul traveled to Hawaii this past November to attend the wedding of one of his grandchildren! And he gave a talk at our Honolulu Temple while there. An active minister every day to the very end. I watched his talk there and he was filled with such joy.

All of us have deep memories of Rev. Paul. It was he that gave me a good push, shove more like it, to look into the ministry myself, so I owe him a tremendous debt of thanks.

It was at the start of September that I was informed of Rev. Paul's health and that it had been planned for him to take the position of supervising minister for BTC. His health now precluded that. So I was asked if I would step up to the plate. I am mindful that you all missed out on having a really wonderful minister in Rev. Paul. He was one of a kind. I can never fill his shoes, and I think he would tell me to fill my own shoes and be my own one of a kind!

Rev. Patti posted about her recent and now last meeting with Paul. It conveys so remarkably his Nenbutsu centrist approach, which I have always found inspiring and pointing to a proper direction to the heart of preaching. Her post can be found at:

<https://windycityjodoshinshu.blogspot.com/2023/11/nembutsu-now-not-off-to-side.html>

It is very moving and a powerful testimony of how Rev. Paul lived his life in Nenbutsu and approached its end in Nenbutsu. It is a lesson I want to take to heart. I think it would be fitting to let Rev. Paul have the last word. He gave a Dharma-talk some time ago which I always admired and transcribed and now share. This is pure gold from Rev. Paul...to each of us...

### Nenbutsu and Comfort by Rev. Paul Imahara

I am told many times people don't understand the meaning of Nenbutsu. Do I truly understand it myself? Not really, so I keep on searching for the ultimate meaning of Nenbutsu. First of all, the Nenbutsu is beyond our thinking and conception because it is coming from the Buddha world. To me it is a calling; the Buddha is calling me directly. Amida Buddha's calling is "Namu Amida Butsu" but I can't hear it.

### Remembrance of a Friend (continued)

I can't hear any voices from flowers  
Cause it is from the flower's world  
But it gives me comfort  
I can't hear Buddha's calling  
Cause it is from the Buddha's world  
But it resonates in me  
I wonder why?  
It is because the Buddha is in my heart  
How do I know that?  
Cause I am going home to where I came from  
The Buddha's world

This is a wonderful poem but it is not mine and I don't remember where I got it but it is in my computer. In Buddhism, everyone who passes away returns to Pureland and become Buddhas. This is also another question I have. How can this be? Am I asked to simply believe in it?

Some of us when we lose our long-time spouses, we become depressed and lonely, wondering why did this happen and start blaming ourselves for the death of our loved ones. I had this feeling for sometime after my wife passed away. I found a note from her the day after her first stroke. It read "Please don't shout at me and push me away." I was shocked and wondered if she sensed something after our argument the day before? Three years later she had another stroke and a week later, a massive heart attack took her away from me forever.

When I repeat Namu Amida Butsu, do I see her as a buddha in front of me? No, I don't. Is it because of my guilt feeling that I may have caused her stroke?

How does the Nenbutsu work on us? Shinran Shonin says nenbutsu is the non-obstructive single path to our awakening. This means Nenbutsu is the only requirement in our lives.

I make regular visit to few nursing homes. I think most people don't want to visit nursing homes. I never did want to go unless I had to. But lately I do want to go. Sometime I wonder why? Why do I want to go? I don't have any special people there. Am I strange? But there is something in me, some energy if I can call it energy, I have the feeling that I am urged something pushes me.

When I make my twice a month visitation, those nursing home patient smile at me, some says they were waiting for me. This is comforting to me. I always talk about Nenbutsu. Saying the words Namu Amida Butsu is the only requirement to be saved at our last stage. I use Shinran Shonin's words, just recite the Nenbutsu, it is the unobstructed single path to lead us to Pureland. How wonderful and simple. But at time I wonder, does it work for those patients who don't know Nenbutsu? Does it work for those people who never heard Namu Amida Butsu?

At nursing homes, I always pass out our service books and ask them to chant the Shoshin-ge with me. My session with them is only 30 minutes so I stop half way and explain what we chant and why we chant, then I explain Nenbutsu the simplest way I know. Some of them are quite attentive but many dozes off as I am talking. As I watch them dozing, they look so peaceful and if I call their names they open their eyes and listen for a while and fall back to sleep. They look so calm and peaceful. I feel they are at the entrance of Pureland or already in it. There is a word "Shojoju" which means truly settled place of truly settled mind, and it is one step before entering the Pureland.

When I personally feel the calling from Amida Buddha, why can I not say those patients are listening to the calling from Amida Buddha also? I feel they are at the Shojoju, one step before entering (cont. on next page)

### Remembrance of a Friend (continued)

the Pureland. Perhaps I shouldn't call their name and wake them up. Because they are buddhas to be. They may not understand my explanation when they are dozing off but I feel they have accepted the Nenbutsu and feel comfort and contentment. They sure look like they are in that comfort zone. And they are my Buddhas and I am comfortable with it. This is why I like to visit them often.

Shinran Shonin left us with many Wasan (a poem or hymns) and the one touching my heart is:

Of those who encounter the power of the Primal Vow,  
Not one passes by in vain,  
They are filled with the treasure ocean of virtues,  
The defiled waters of their blind passions not separated from it.

From this hymn, I feel I am in **the power of primal vow**, it is for me to accept the primal vow, then I am filled with the **ocean of virtues**. This does not mean I become a virtuous person. It means Amida's virtue comes to me. I am full of **defiled waters of my blind passions** I am also filled with Amida's virtues. Then what happens? My blind passions settle down, the defiled water seems to clear up. This makes me comfortable. But the dirty mud of blind passions is not settled for good. It is still a big part of me. When I get disturbed, the blind passions want to take over but Amida's virtue is much stronger and powerful. I don't need to be frustrated for too long, Amida's virtues wins over and I can cool down rather quickly. I don't think I'm at the truly settled stage. I don't feel I'm at one step before entering Pureland. But I am okay knowing I am full of blind passions and at the same time I have Amida Buddha's virtues within me. This gives me comfort.

Namu Amida Butsu  
Paul Imahara  
Nov. 2017



### Scheduled activities – subject to change

Weekly services – Sundays 11am - in-person and on FB Live  
Children's Dharma School service – February 11<sup>th</sup> & February 25<sup>th</sup>  
Qigong (Chinese exercise) – *on hiatus until further notice*  
Sunday Meditation 9am – in-person only  
Thursday Meditation 7:15pm – Feb 8th FB Live, other days FB Live & in-person  
Asoka Society (social gathering) – *on break until March 2024*

The above activities are open to the public and free (donations appreciated).

If you are interested in the two activities below, please leave your contact information and the group will set up an appointment for you to visit them.

Iaido (martial art) – Mondays 7:00pm

Kokyo Taiko (drums) – Friday evenings, Sunday afternoons

## **More Than Sunday Service by Bill Bohlman, Temple President**

When the pandemic occurred, and for a period of time afterwards, the Sunday service and other temple activities were greatly affected. As we strive to return to the pre-pandemic normal, these activities are back to their regular schedules.

Although Sunday service is the most important activity not everyone may be able to attend in person. That is why Sunday service is live streamed on our Facebook page every week. If you cannot watch it live you can watch the recorded service later. Another activity available on Facebook is the Thursday evening meditation session. There is meditation on Sunday morning before service and Thursday evening, with the Thursday session live streamed.

On the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month the Sunday service is also the Dharma School Sunday. The children attend the first half of the service and then go to their class. The Dharma School started all over again after the pandemic and has been steadily growing.

Some of the other temple activities are qigong, taiko and laido. The qigong group meets every Tuesday afternoon and is open to anyone who would like to participate. This low impact form of exercise is great for people of all ages and abilities.

The laido group has continued to grow during the past year. As one of the few laido dojos in Chicago interest has been strong. This group meets Monday evenings and their sessions include instruction by a sensei in Japan joining them via Zoom.

Our taiko group, Kokyo Taiko, has performed at various venues throughout the Chicago area. Their usual practice times are Friday evening and Sunday afternoon. For information about participating in either laido or taiko go to our website [buddhisttemplechicago.org](http://buddhisttemplechicago.org).

Some of the highlights each year are the special event. This year on the 2nd Sunday of July will be our Natsu Matsuri. Featuring our world famous teriyaki chicken, along with other food, vendors, and entertainment, this cultural festival is the temple's primary fundraiser. Later in the summer, in August, is the Obon Odori. Concluding the year is mochitsuki, the traditional rice pounding. All these events are open to the public and bring together the sangha in a true sense of community.

The temple is here for you. It is our hope that in the coming year you will take full advantage of what is offered.

### **DEEPEST SYMPATHY**

To the family and friends of

May Hirai

December 25, 2023

## **Successful Mochitsuki 2023, Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!**

by Gary T. Nakai

This year's Mochitsuki was so wonderfully gratifying! The skills displayed from decades of traditional mochi making at BTC made for a rewarding experience for our members, friends, and newcomers alike. The coordination between all tasks was a testament to cooperative hands, all having fun! This culminated with everyone pitching in during clean up too. Days of advance preparations and setup by Gwen Kato, June Kato, April Kellman, Jane Morishige, Gary & Jeanne Shimomura, Tomio Tademoto, and Mike Tanimura proved crucial because this year we processed 20 extra pounds of mochigome.

The 3-day soak schedule made for achieving uniform grain soaking which made for the reliable steaming experienced throughout the day. There were no delays experienced in the steaming process and the talented response at the Usu (pounding stone) kept up! The kitchen crew of Mike Kudo, Jr., Stanley Oda, and Ben, managed by Mike Tanimura, made it possible to produce smooth and uniform mochi.

The lively action at the Usu by strong, reliable perennial pounders Eric Hattori, Alan, Eric, and Mitchell Kato, Mark Keehan, Bob Kumaki, Patrick Lathitham, George Philosophos, Tal Rosen, Gary, Tyler, Sam Shimomura, and first-time, exuberant pounder Jeffrey Kleinsorge. There were willing adults and children alike taking a swing; and the remarkable first-time apprenticeship of June Kato, who at the last minute, agreed to learn the skill of turner and quickly caught on and took charge of the action and produced perfect batch after batch.

The bustling crew at the forming table turned out perfect cakes, forming the various sizes for Osonae, Kagami, and the regular plain and filled with An (sweet red bean paste); Noreen Enkoji, Lorrie Kakita, Sadie Kasamoto, Hayako Kikuchi, Susan Kuse, Jane Morishige, Naomi & and Dylan Mounce, Kiaria Rybak; Mari Niizuma, Mary Ozaki, Lisa and Emma Philibert, Mieko Yoshida, and curious volunteers getting covered in powdery white, all supervised and directed again this year by Gwen Kato.

The orderly sales team, Bill Bohlman, April Kellman and Betty Segal, packaged the admired product under the watchful direction of Ed Horiuchi.

This year we resurrected the treat for workers and guests to sample freshly made mochi with shoyu and kinako (soy sauce and roasted soy flour), that was no-doubt an incentive for purchases of mochi to take home.

This year boasted yet another milestone achieved by Mrs. Chiyeko Yoshida, one of our perennial pounders, who at the youthful age of 99, showed us what her joyful exuberance can accomplish. She re-set her record of last year as the most senior Kine (mallet) wielding pounder in BTC's long tradition. For this achievement, she was presented a certificate by Rev. Patti Nakai and a "red carpet" photo-op with special guest, Consul General of Japan in Chicago, Mr. Jun Yanagi. To note, the Consul General, Mrs. Norika Yanagi, Executive Chef Ms. Akiko Nishimura, and his deputy consuls Ms. Sanae Kanno, Mr. Naoya Kishi, all jointly wielded Kine to pound an entire session together.

The demand for finished mochi cakes was so high so, maybe we need to further increase the total quantity of mochigome for next time.

The most important lessons were affirmed: everyone is welcome to enjoy this cultural tradition at BTC, and working hard together makes for an appreciative sangha! The general sentiment was excitement for this year's Mochitsuki! Check out additional photos on our Facebook. Doumo, Doumo, Doumo.



## The Buddhist Temple of Chicago

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### February 2024 Calendar

Events may be canceled or moved:

Check [www.facebook.com/budtempchi](https://www.facebook.com/budtempchi)  
for the most up-to-date changes.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Meditation 7:15pm	2 Taiko* 7pm	3
4 9:00am Meditation 11am Monthly Memorial	5 laido* 7:00pm	6	7	8 Meditation 7:15pm FB only	9 Taiko* 7pm	10
11 9:00am Meditation 11am Dharma School Service	12 laido* 7:00pm	13	14	15 Meditation 7:15pm	16 Taiko* 7pm	17
18 9:00am Meditation 11am Service	19 laido* 7:00pm	20	21	22 Meditation 7:15pm	23 Taiko* 7pm	24
25 9:00am Meditation 11am Dharma School Service	26 laido* 7:00pm	27	28	29 Meditation 7:15pm		

\*laido and Taiko require appointments made in advance