

New Year's Dharma Message
by Shaku Kenjitsu (Rev. T. K. Nakagaki)

“Still the Sun Rises”

Every year, we celebrate the beginning of a new year. But this year's new year is different from any other new year in the past for many of us. The event of September 11, 2001, has left a great impact on all of us especially to those who live in New York.

From a long human history of wars, many things and many lives have been destroyed and lost, Not only human lives have been affected but all creatures who live on the earth. The Millennium began with wars. It is within the human karma. Human beings seem to have war in their nature. Greed, hatred and ignorance are part of human nature. People want to win and do not want to lose in their lives. If someone wins, there is always someone who loses. We make friends and we make enemies. We love someone, and we hate someone. People argue that my God or religion is right and absolute one and negate or turn away from other Gods or religions.

In spite of all arguments and opposition among people, the sun rises and brings benefits to all beings on the earth. Spring comes, summer comes, fall comes and winter comes. The wind blows, flowers bloom, trees grow. The moon and stars give lights in the dark night. Animals, birds, fish live their own lives cooperating with the surroundings of the nature.

In Japan, one of the popular customs is to celebrate the new year by watching the sun rise on the morning of January 1. I remember that when I was in Japan, my family went up to the mountain top to see the sun rise on new year's day. It was rather cold; and when we arrived, already many people were there before us waiting for the sun rise. When the sun came up a little bit from the ground, suddenly it became really bright. It was a great feeling when the morning sun light enveloped me with warmth as if whatever happened in the past did not matter anymore, and I could walk forward in another new year. My human travails seemed trivial as I was in the mountain embraced by the sun light.

Learning the Buddha-Dharma for me is similar to realize the vastness and greatness of nature. Instead of looking at my limited shadow, I look up at the sky which expands unlimitedly. That is where I find my smallness. By hearing the world of the Buddha-Dharma (which was expressed through the boundless wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha in Jodoshinshu Buddhism), we realize our smallness, limitedness, and ignorance. The Nembutsu always makes us mindful of the vast and deep world of Enlightenment, even though we are drowning in amidst suffering and problems.

Let us always keep the fresh morning sun of the Dharma in our mind. Happy new year !

Namo-amidabu, namo-amidabu, namo-amidabu...

Early morning, the sun rises on the first day of the year

Whatever has happened before, I can accept it and move forward.

Years and years and years, the sun has risen,

Embraced and encouraged countless people.

All the lives on earth have received benefit.

Realizing a simple occurrence is a way of Enlightenment. (poem by Shaku Kenjitsu)