

## New Year's Dharma Message

### “Encountering Light”

By Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

A Happy New Year to you all! May 2007 bring you happiness and peace, being embraced by the boundless wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha.

What comes to mind when you hear the words “new year”? For me, it is the light of a sunrise. When I was in Japan, I used to go to Mt. Ikoma in Nara to see the New Year's Day sunrise with my family. I enjoyed the freshness, serenity and sacredness of the sunrise, though I did not necessarily enjoy waking up early in the morning.

When I took a group of 12 people to India last year (November 24-December 10, 2006), I included time to view sunrise as well as sunset. We went to see the sunrise at the Ganges River and at Buddhagaya, and the sunset at the Ganges River and at Vaishali. They were bright red, and so beautiful. We had silent meditation and chanting at sunrise and sunset. With palms together, the feeling of the sunrise and sunset in India was so special for me. It was like the experience of freshness, serenity, and sacredness on a new year's day. Siddhartha fully realized the law of the universe and became a Buddha, an awakened one, at the sunrise on December 8 at the age of 35 under the Bodhi tree in Buddhagaya.

I did a calligraphy using the characters for “Encountering Light” for this year's New Year card, wishing that all the beings will encounter the light of the Buddha, which is similar to seeing the sunrise on a special occasion. Light is very important element in most religions, and Buddhism is no exception. Buddha's last words are “Make yourself a light, and make the dharma a light.” Encountering light means that there is no more darkness in your life, or that your life becomes filled with light. In the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, light represents an essential central figure, Amida Buddha. Amida is the Buddha of Infinite Light illuminating all the darkness and ignorance of the world. Amida is described as twelve lights—immeasurable light, boundless light, unhindered light, incomparable light, king of light, pure light, joyful light, wisdom light, untiring light, inconceivable light, indescribable light, light beyond the sun and moon.

Shinran Shonin, the founder of the Jodoshinshu (Shin) Buddhism, said in his Wasan-hymn,  
The light of purity is without compare;  
When a person encounters this light,  
All the bonds of karma fall away;  
So take refuge in Amida, the ultimate shelter.

Encountering the light of Amida Buddha is the experience of the light coming to us and embracing us with boundless compassion, instead of us going to the light to capture it.

Living the life with gratitude  
Is possible when one encounters the truth in life  
Gazing at the sunrise  
Hearing the wind  
There, I find the light coming to me! (by Kenjitsu)

Namo-Amidabu 