

The Aspect of Great Joy



by Hiroshi Abiko

To describe a state which transcends all states of being, as well as those forms which may be called super, men in both East and West have used the word "great." We have also seen numerous occasions when "great" has been used as a prefix, and strangely enough, there are numerous occasions when a person claims greatness for himself.

In order to describe the experience of a person of *Shinjin*, or Faith-Mind, the word "great" is most appropriate. For the experience of joy realized in a person of *Shinjin*, in that moment of realization, he is nothing less than great. And it is largely due to the basic yearning of living beings, past and present, who endlessly strove to become great that eight centuries of *Jodoshinshu* teachings have endured and expanded in the world. As long as living beings seek that greatness in them as well as in others, *Jodoshinshu* teachings will prevail and pulsate in the hearts of all people.

In *Jodoshinshu*, as taught by Shinran Shonin, a person is led to greatness by a realization which elevates him to the height of true joy and, at the same time, leads him to a depth of experience hitherto unknown to him. It is a realization provided only for those who risk themselves by a total commitment to Amida Buddha. That realization comes when a person discovers that all is endowed by Amida Buddha unconditionally.

No one is able to deny that all things must be inter-related and inter-dependent to exist. In fact, to exist means to be inter-dependent. In the midst of a person's daily busy-ness, he tends to disregard the elusive truth of inter-dependency mainly because of his self-centeredness. But occasionally, he is reminded of that fact of inter-dependency in which he finds himself to be just a small knot in a huge net. He also discovers that without that tiny knot, the whole net will not hold. He realizes that the world appeared to him confined because of his own narrow-mindedness. The pictures reflected on his mind-heart are not true pictures for they were designed by his narrow vision. So with each opportunity presented to him to become aware of the inter-relationship of himself to others, his perspective widens; the relationship is interpreted anew, his awareness growing outwardly as well as inwardly. Outwardly, he now identifies himself on a grander scale of universality; inwardly, he comes to know himself honestly as a person who is ever more steeped in narrow confinement. There occurs in the mind-heart of such person a sense of joyful realization that

it is the whole net which holds him just as he is a part of a whole.

On the other hand, what seems to be the opposite of the above also holds true. No one is able to deny the fact that all things exist alone. No matter how closely a person may feel for another and willfully carries his burdens, there is a limit to human capabilities. A person who is aware of this fact knows that the misery which a person experiences is for him alone to be experienced, and as in the case of a rust from iron eats into its own source, similarly, that person's deeds alone corrode his own life. A person who honestly sees himself awakened by this fact is prompted to seek greater truth that will justify his solitary condition. It is to such a person of serious search that the universal nature moves and touches, endowing him the meaning of existence.

In the middle of the manifold levels of realization as mentioned, one being that all things exist inter-dependently and the other being that all things exist alone, the experience of joy is found. In this seeming contradiction, a person is able to gain a threshold of greatness.

When a person begins to truly know himself and the world in which he lives, he grows spiritually. In a simultaneous happening, as his mind-heart deepens and expands to a universal dimension, his realization also becomes greater. At the depth of his realization of his honest self, he comes to know that it is the greatness of the universal truth manifesting as true and real which has been moving towards him. He acknowledges as a fact that it is the world of true and real which has been endowing him to become aware. The greater the sense of his aloneness, the greater the sense of oneness. He joyfully discovers that the relationship of himself with true and real is none other than the manifestation of Amida Buddha who for aeons of time has been prompting to awake that person. The magnitude of joy experienced by that person of awakening could only be expressed as he recites the Name of Amida Buddha. Reciting Amida Buddha's Name in all earnest gratitude, then, is the universal act of oneness, perfecting the inter-relationship of a person and Amida Buddha. The true joy thus experienced by a person now enables that person to relate the world truly and realistically, any time, any place. All experiences gained by him henceforth become the experience of joy for he now sees the world from a greater foundation, a foundation of all-embracing Amida Buddha.