



Buddhist Thoughts

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Hongan: Hope for the Damned (Part I) Carmela Javellana Hirano M.D.

Introduction

The New Age of Mind-Body (Integrative) Medicine, neuroscience, psycho-rehabilitation, and the Mindfulness-Meditation movement has emerged, as reflected in scientific and conceptual studies in the last 50 years or so. In spite of the above, the stigma of “mental illness” continues on, even in the medical community. The NIMH-NCCAM (National Institute of Mental Health – National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine) has a wealth of scientific research on the beneficial effects of regular mindfulness-meditation practice, movement therapies like yoga and qigong, Chinese medicine including acupuncture, and even bodywork like massage and chiropractic manipulations, on brain-mind health and overall well-being. More awareness has been brought to the stress-lowering effects of these body-mind healing arts. Buddhist teachings and publications, such as those by DT Suzuki, Thich Naht Hanh, Pema Chodron, Sharon Salzberg and Jack Kornfield, and popularized by celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Goldie Hawn and Richard Gere have brought to the mainstream American consciousness that Buddhist teachings have notable value in our current spiritual development and maturity, even as capitalism and materialism flourish despite the recession from the mid-2000's. All of these movements highlight the need for addressing human suffering above and beyond conventional medicine. However, there is a noticeably silent dearth in Nembutsu-informed literature that specifically speaks to the mental health and medical communities.

This paper asserts the following points:

- 1) Pure Land Buddhist doctrine, especially the 18th Vow (*Hongan*), as expounded in the Triple Sutras, is the ultimate healing element, the powerful expedient means for people suffering from mental illness, especially for those who cannot perform mindfulness-meditation practice.
- 2) Freedom from suffering is the aspiration of every human being. In the mental health field,

this is the main impetus for seeking medical care; in the religious perspective, loss of trust in one's own capability for relief becomes a crisis of faith, resulting in the mind of aspiration for birth in the Pure Land (bodhicitta). That this is already assured and fulfilled by Amida's Primal Vow without discrimination or condition is a powerful message that can bring immense hope and relief in the face of hopelessness and fear;

3) Mentally ill patients often view themselves as "broken" and recognize the need to trust and have faith in their health care providers. Pure Land Buddhism emphasizes the universality of all human beings as *bombu* – *foolish beings*, which not only refers to patients with mental illness but also the community of the helping professions as well -- all bound by the same futility of self-power and the delusion of self-efficacy. This constitutes a paradigm shift in the delivery of health care, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing the limitations of both patient and healthcare provider in the transformation of suffering to nonsuffering, and the need for a collaborative relationship between the two. This also illustrates the need of healthcare provider to be on the Bodhisattva path themselves;

4) Pure Land Buddhist teachings can only add to the fullness of our existential, philosophical and psychological understanding of the human condition.

The foundation of Nembutsu teachings lies in the Triple Sutras of the Pure Land Tradition:

- 1) The Larger Sutra (*The Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life; Bussetsu Muryo Jukyo*) – translated in 308 CE. The main message of this sutra is how Bodhisattva Dharmakara became Amida Buddha by fulfilling 48 Vows, central to which is the 18th Vow, to save all beings from suffering without exception and conditionality and carry them from the world of *dukkha* to the world of *nirvana*, or the Pure Land.
- 2) The Contemplation Sutra (*Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life; Kan Muryo Jukkyo*) – translated in 424-442 CE. This sutra expounds on the family drama of King Bimbisara left to die in the dungeon by his murderous son Ajatasatru, and Queen Vaidehi locked in prison for conspiring to kill their only son in his infancy, the malicious insinuation of Devadatta that led to this tragic end, and their court of advisers, all embroiled in heavy evil karma of hatred and revenge. With this as backdrop, the Buddha taught how foolish and evil beings, even the most heinous ones, are also grasped in the salvific compassion of Amida Buddha with the simple practice of saying *Namo Amida Butsu*.
- 3) The Smaller Sutra (*Sutra on Amida Buddha; Bussetsu Amidakyo*) - translated in 402 CE. The essence is on the fantasmical description of the Pure Land, the cause of birth there, and how all the Buddhas endorse and praise this land of Bliss.

Although these teachings date back almost a couple of millennia before the establishment of American society, their descriptions of the human psyche and the realm of *dukkha* have gone beyond historical, religious, language, cultural and geographic distinctions. This is because the Nembutsu teachings are universal to every human being, and can be understood in the context of the care of the mentally ill living in the Buddha-realm of "foolish (insane) beings."

The Buddha was considered to have been a very skilled psychotherapist, therapeutic story-teller and physician, who taught the Dharma based on the patient's understanding and intellectual capacity. In the *Contemplation Sutra*, for example, he explains to Queen Vaidehi the nine grades of spiritual practice and birth in the Pure Land divided into high, middle, and low capacity. (p. 48-61, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, Vol. I, Shin Buddhism Translation Series.)

He takes her on guided imagery through the 16 contemplations, until he gets to the lowest grade of the lowest rank of “*sentient beings who commit evils as the five grave offenses and the ten transgressions, thus burdened with all kinds of evil...When he is about to die, he may meet a true teacher who consoles him in various ways and, preaching the wondrous dharma, advises him to be mindful of the Buddha. But he is too severely tormented by pain to do so. Then this good friend says to him, ‘If you cannot concentrate your thought on the Buddha, you should simply recite the Name of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life.’ Accordingly, he sincerely and continuously says ‘Namo Amida Butsu’ ten times. Because he recites the Name of the Buddha, with each recitation his evil karma binding him to birth-and-death for 80 kotis of kalpas is eliminated.*” (p. 60, The Three Pure Land Sutras, Vol. 1) For us contemporary people, this is akin to taking our medications for many doses in order for our illness to be healed or alleviated.

He then tells her, diagnostically speaking, that she is “*merely an ordinary person. Since your mind is weak and inferior and you have yet to acquire divine sight, you are unable to see which is distant.*” (The Three Pure Land Sutras, Vol. 1, p. 25) Her question, in response to his assessment, is of particular salience now, in our time: “*World-Honored One, through the power of the Buddha, even a person like me is now able to see that land. However, after the Buddha’s passing, all people, being defiled and evil, will be tormented by the five kinds of suffering. How then will they be able to see Amida Buddha’s World of Perfect Bliss?*” (Three Pure Land Sutras, Vol. 1, p. 26)

Yes, indeed, how can suffering beings in these present times be able to obtain relief from their maladies, diagnoses and comorbidities, and mental and physical dis-ease?
(For a schematic representation of the ideas expounded in this paper, please refer to Appendix 1)

The Damned

To suffer from mental illness is to be “damned.” To be “damned” is to be foolish, ignorant of one’s own ignorance, and therefore hopelessly trapped in *samsara*. We human beings generally go about our way traipsing through cluelessness of how we cause suffering for ourselves and others because our “defiled” minds are constantly focused on satisfying our insatiable egos. It seems that it is only in the state of unbearable despair and hopelessness that we realize our limitations, whether they be our personal strengths or our support systems. We refuse to surrender to the reality of our pain and helplessness because our ignorance as *bombu* cannot discern a greater Truth beyond the boundaries of our pain itself. We often believe this is all there is. Therefore to be in a state of mental health crisis is to be in a state of crisis of faith.

A crisis of faith constitutes loss of trust in what was previously held reliable and dependable. Therefore, the old support systems of family, neighbors, friends, churches, medical and academic institutions, and even medications may all fall short of the patient’s expectations, leaving the patient in a lurch. At some point, the patient also recognizes his/her own limitations, but yet there is one little spark of hope left that prompts the patient to seek yet one more therapist, one more physician, until there are no more resources to exhaust.

This hope comes from one’s great need to be heard, accepted, and loved. From the perspective of the suffering world, the patient submits to the recommendations from the therapist/physician for treatment. For the health care provider, this is either an opportunity to exert self-power, or from a Jodo Shinshu perspective, the therapist, being human himself/herself, also limited by *bon no*, recognizes the true source of power – Amida Buddha.

The Amida Sutra's explicit teaching is the *True Gate* that leads to "*birth that is noncomprehensible (to be attained through self-power nembutsu)*" (p. 137, Appendices, Three Pure Land Sutras Vol. II) as stated in the 20th Vow: *If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, upon hearing my name, should place their thoughts in my land, cultivate the roots of virtue, and direct their merit with sincere mind desiring to be born in my land, and yet not ultimately attain birth, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.*" (p. 23, Three Pure Land Sutras Vol. II) The self-power of providing treatment for the patient can be understood in the context of the 20th Vow as health care providers "*cultivate roots of virtue and direct their merit with sincere mind desiring to be born in my land.*"

The Larger Sutra illustrates the depth of suffering of human beings. "*...People in the world are so shallow and vulgar as to quarrel among themselves over matters of no urgency. In the midst of grave wickedness and extreme afflictions of the world, they busy themselves in leading their lives. Noble or base, poor or rich, young or old, male or female, all they worry about is wealth and property. Whether or not they are possessed of fortune, they are all the same in having anxieties...if they happen to have one thing, they feel that something else is lacking....In the midst of worldly desires and attachments, people are born alone and die alone, come alone and go alone...The unchanging reality is that living and dying follow one after another without cease. At times, parents mourn the death of their children, and in turn, children mourn the death of their parents. Brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, cry over each other's death. That death may occur in reverse order is the principle of impermanence. All things are subject to change and nothing remains the same....Lost and sinking in anger and rage, they pursue material wealth and carnal satisfaction like hungry wolves. Because of this, unable to attain the Way, they return to the suffering of the evil realms and repeat the cycle of birth-and-death endlessly. How pitiful and wretched they are!*" (p. 68, 69, 70, 72, Three Pure Land Sutras, Vol. II.)

To be "damned" also connotes "treatment resistance," or beyond help, beyond intervention. "Mental illness" defined neurobiologically is a disorder of the nervous system, central and autonomic, gone awry from the constant pounding of the chronic stress of unmet desires. Even severe brain disorders like schizophrenia and autism spectrum disorders have the core elements of ignorance, hatred and craving in the incessant search for relief. Self-centeredness is the genetic fate of the human species, for the purpose of self-preservation and evolutionary survival on the one hand, and the curse of ignorance, hatred, and greed that bring immense suffering on the other. How can human beings, helplessly and hopelessly trapped in ego-importance, especially during periods of psychopathological anxiety and despair, be liberated from their very source of agony, attachment to the ego itself? How can human beings free themselves from themselves?

Contemporary mental health interventions try to address this crisis from a "symptom reduction" approach – i.e., the goal is to feel better, assuming that somehow when one feels better, the problem has been solved. This has nothing to do with actual reality but has everything to do with *perception* (the subjective view shaped by conditioning). Buddhism encourages seeing "reality-as-it-is," the objectivity that goes beyond perception. This includes awareness of suffering itself (e.g., painful emotions) and the cause of suffering, i.e., attachment.

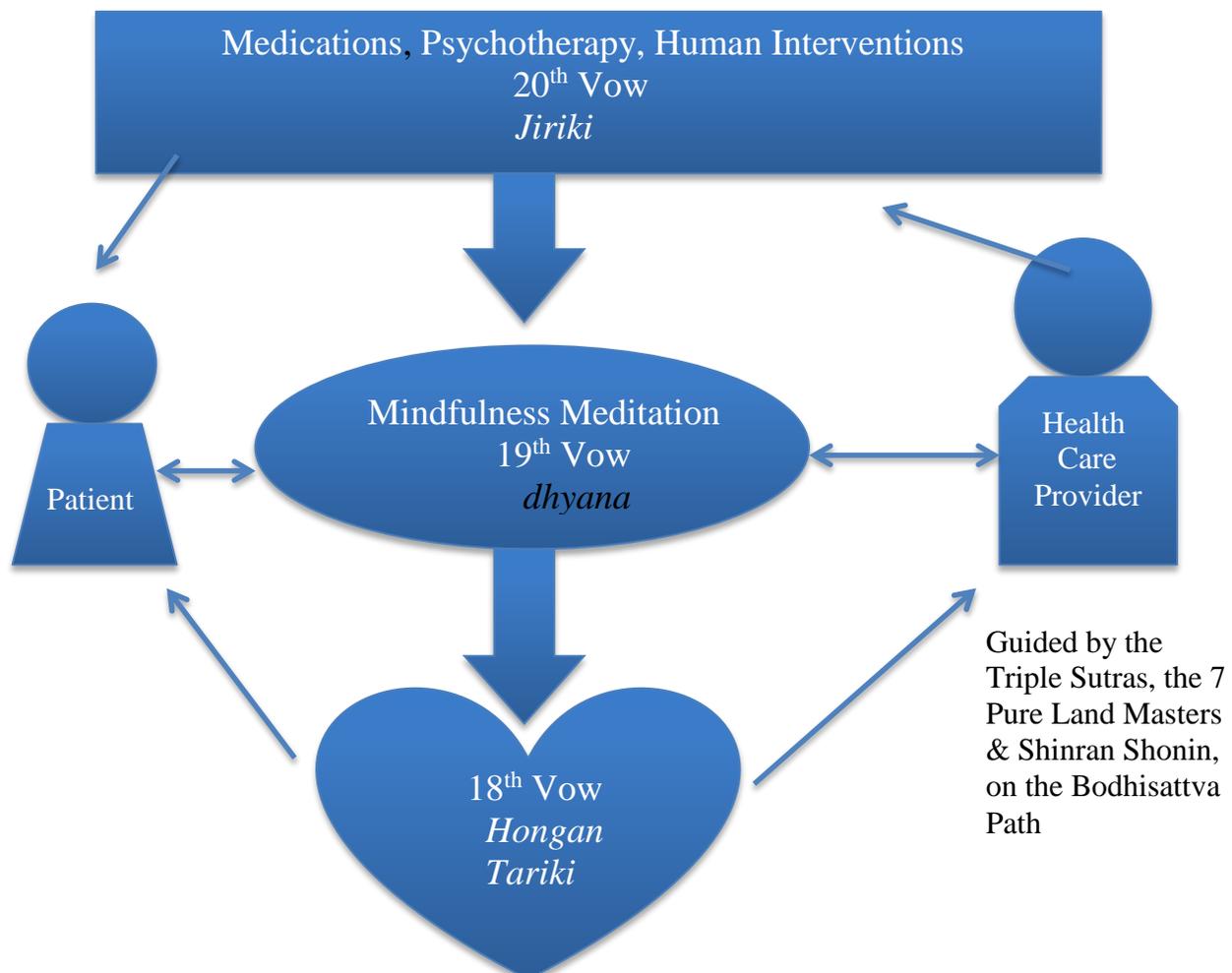
The Mindfulness-Meditation Movement has become very popular and strongly encouraged among the helping professions, because being with human suffering takes an incredible amount of vital energy to pay attention, be completely present, and withstand the intense emotional upheaval and narratives that patients wish their caregivers to lift from them. However, awareness of the reality of suffering alone does not necessarily explain how this suffering is alleviated. We know from a multitude of scientific research that regular practice of mindfulness-meditation unequivocally results in benefits for both body and mind. Mindfulness-meditation is a conscious choice, practiced with intention, discipline, and open-mindedness with elements of curiosity and interested observation. Therefore it is still ego-driven, and, if so, how is it possible for the ego to liberate itself from itself? Or another way of saying, how can a foolish being see his own foolishness, much less liberate himself from his own foolishness? The 19th Vow, in the Larger Sutra, illustrates the salvation of those engaging in self-powered practice of mindfulness-meditation: *“If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, while awakening the mind aspiring for enlightenment and performing meritorious acts, should desire to be born in my land with sincere aspiration, and yet should I not appear before them at the moment of death surrounded by a host of sages, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.”* (p. 23, The Three Pure Land Sutras Vol. II)

A crisis of faith, and a “nervous breakdown” cannot possibly be resolved from an egoic source. There has to be an agency beyond the ego that makes happen the natural order of a chaotic universe, something dynamically alive in and of itself. This natural order is *jinen*. According to Shinran (p. 427, CWS I), *“Ji means ‘of itself’ – not through the practitioner’s calculation. It signifies being made so. Nen means ‘to be made so’ – it is not through the practitioner’s calculation; it is through the working of the Tathagata’s Vow.”* This is nature’s wish to be itself, the healing element that happens for its own sake, outside the comprehension and manipulations of the human ego, the brain changes unforced and spontaneous when the mind is focused and single.

Granted that early Buddhism, especially the work of Nagarjuna, expounds on *emptiness* – *i.e.*, *sunyata*, and that the “no self” means “no suffering,” this concept may be too profound, and even absurd for someone whose suffering is very real. Also *impermanence* may be too formless as well, because when one is “stuck” in depression for days and weeks and months, this idea is only an idea, not reality in the present moment. So, what would make sense to a suffering human being stuck in the mud of *samsara* who desperately wants to get unstuck? The answer to existential and circumstantial suffering has to be real, concrete, tangible, present, and intimately meaningful to the person in abject misery.

APPENDIX 1: HEALING THROUGH THE PRIMAL VOW
Contemporary Mental Health Care & Buddhist Teachings

Treatment Therapy	“Hope” Cause of Relief (Cure)	Nenbutsu (<i>shinjin</i>)
Mentally Ill	“Damned”	Bombu
Mental Illness	“Damnation”	Bon no
Relief, Cure, Remission	Treatment Outcome	Stage of Nonretrogression



(Part II: Hope for the Damned to be continued in the July issue)

Lumbini's Garden Opens June 14th

“Lumbini’s Garden” is the birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha as well as the title of a beloved Dharma School Gatha. And now it is the name of the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple’s new Bookstore, Lumbini’s **Garden, Book and Gift Store***. The bookstore is a long time dream of Hirano Sensei. He initially envisioned a place where people can mix and mingle and be a part of the Sangha. This dream is now a reality as the bookstore opening is just around the corner.

Lumbini’s Garden will be a retail gift and book store. (It is not a thrift store, a used book store or a restaurant.) It will offer books and gift items related to Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. There will also be a wide variety of items to enhance the spiritual mind, body and soul; Japanese Odori equipment; jewelry and purses; Japanese keepsakes including tea pots, sake sets and dish ware; health care products and other Asian inspired goods. Lumbini’s Garden will host monthly cultural activities such as Japanese cooking, calligraphy, and Asian crafts. The hours of operation will be on Sundays following service until 1:00 pm, on special events, i.e. Obon and by appointment only.

Lumbini’s Garden will be an asset not only for our temple and Sangha but for the Japanese community and the greater community as a whole. The **mission** of the Bookstore is to share the Buddha-Dharma, to raise the awareness of Jodo Shinshu (Japanese Pure Land) Buddhism and to enrich the community with Japanese culture. The **vision** of the Bookstore is to be a “haven for living a spiritually awakened life, in the midst of ordinary circumstances” and to provide a much needed additional revenue stream for our temple. The **values** of the Bookstore are to follow the Nembutsu path to live a life of gratitude for Amida Buddha's infinite wisdom and compassion and to be a resource for self reflection and self discovery.

The Grand Opening of Lumbini’s Garden will be on Saturday, June 14, 2014 from 10 a.m - 4 p.m. There will be delicious food, make and take crafts and other demonstrations. All the necessities for the upcoming Obon Festival will be available for purchase. Your attendance and participation in the Grand Opening is very much appreciated. In the words of our favorite gatha, “Softly blew the breezes, on that summer morn, in Lumbini’s Garden, where the Lord was born.” See you in Lumbini’s Garden!

*The bookstore, as approved by the board and with the support of Sensei, will be a part of the temple as an affiliated organization. It is governed by its own bylaws and board members. It has a business license issued from the city. The Bookstore board members who have generously donated their time and expertise in the remodeling and development of the bookstore will also be responsible for all aspects of the business side of the bookstore, including but not limited to the marketing, the acquisition and pricing of inventory, the budget and finances and the daily operating responsibilities of the bookstore as written in the bylaws.

BWA News

Elaine Endo

Several BWA members met in May to discuss upcoming summer events. These include:

*Wendover bus trip in conjunction with the Ogden Buddhist Temple. For those of you who reserved a spot, the bus will pick us up at our temple at 9:00 instead of 7:30 as previously noted. We will leave Wendover at 5:30 getting us back to the temple about 7:00.

*Obon: The BWA is, once again, in charge of making sushi. If you are available, we could use some help on Thursday and Friday, July 10 & 11 to prepare ingredients, and early Saturday, July 12, to roll the sushi.

Our next meeting will be Monday, June 30 at 6:00. Please join us and then stay for Obon practice afterwards,

Shotsuki Hoyo

June 9, 10:00 am

Deceased	Date of death	Next of kin
Akiyama Uhichi	6/12/67	Francis Akimoto
Fujimoto Kanta	6/7/56	Grace Oshita
Fujinami Tomakichi	6/12/68	Mitsuru Fujinami
Harada Tsuyono	6/2/85	Harada Family
Imai Fujii	6/28/91	Aoki Family
Kobayashi Tsui	6/20/43	Kobayashi Family
Mayeda Buntaro	6/5/89	Fumio Mayeda
Muraki Sakae	6/24/87	Nakamura Family
Nakamura Chogoro	6/28/45	Takae Nakamura
Noda Ben	6/29/92	Noda Family
Sakinada Kathleen	6/4/89	Sakinada Family
Sasaki Nobuko	6/22/34	Charlie Sasaki
Shiba Eiji	6/30/85	Shiba Family
Suzuki Kiyoji	6/11/69	Masako Suzuki
Tadehara Mary	6/30/84	Rose Kamaya
Tani Hatsuye Mary	6/17/84	Eleanor Nakamura
Yokome Roy	6/26/95	Ray Uno
Araki Aiko	6/16/98	Aoki Family
Aoki Fred Toshio	6/17/98	Kay Aoki
Niwa Teruchiyo	6/11/00	Pat Ninomiya
Karen Haruko Shiba	6/17/00	Tosh Shiba
Kiyo Nakamura	6/10/04	Phil Nakamura
Fusano Mayeda	6/21/76	Yoshiko Kido
John Kasubuchi	6/8/10	Robert Kasubuchi
Floyd Okubo	6/22/10	Byron Okubo
Kenneth Kobayashi	6/10/11	Jean Kobayashi

Obon Dance Practices

June 30

July 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11

7:00 pm

Salt Lake Buddhist Temple

SUMMER SERVICES

10 A.M. Sundays on the following dates:

June 15, 22, 29

July 13*, 20, & 27

August 3, 10, 24

***Hatsubon Service starts at 1:00 p.m.**

**Join us for Qi Gong at 9:30 a.m. &
Dharma Discussion at 11:00 a.m.**

(We will be studying Tannisho)



Open to the Public * "Come as You Are"

2014 April-May DONATIONS

(Through May 18, 2014)

Hanamatsuri

Lynn Shimada	50	Koyo Restaurant	100
Misuko Shimada	20		

Gotan E

Mas & May Akiyama	50	Jane Sakashita	25
Mits & Terry Fujinami	25	Setsuko Nagata	25
Ichiro & Takeko Doi	25	Tomio & Junko Mitsunaga	25
Kenneth & Renee Matsuura	40	Byron & Reiko Watanabe	25
Rev. Jerry & Carmela Hirano	100	Maxine Furubayashi	25
Kazuko Yakumo	25		

Shotsuki Hoyo

Lynn Shimada	25	In Memory Of:	
Rev. Jerry & Carmela Hirano	50	Tai Oishi	
Tomie & Chizuko Ishimatsu	100	Ikuye Hirano & Kazuyo Hirano	
Charlie Sasaki	25	Mother	
Maxine Furubayashi	25		
Mark & Gail Minaga	25	Tomi Atagi	
Mark & Gail Minaga	25	Taka Minaga	
Phil & Merry Nakamura	25	Nishie Sasaki	
Misuko Shimada	50	Shigeru Shimada	

Dharma School

Ernie & Laverne Kyed	25	Bowling Party	
Jeff & Soni Hirasuna	30	Bowling Party	
Buster Mayeda	20	Parent's Day	
Chic Terashima	20	Parent's Day	
anonymous, cash	20	Parent's Day	
Robert & Tami Tokita	20	Parent's Day	
Ernie & Laverne Kyed	20	Parent's Day	
Dean & Rise Hirabayashi	20	Parent's Day	
Kenneth & Renee Matsuura	30	Parent's Day	
Mits & Terry Fujinami	25	Parent's Day	
Ichiro & Takeko Doi	25	Parent's Day	
Setsuko Nagata	25	Parent's Day	
Tomio & Junko Mitsunaga	30	Parent's Day	
Byron & Reiko Watanabe	20	Parent's Day	
Maxine Furubayashi	25	Parent's Day	
Paul & Kathy Terashima	25	Parent's Day	
Reiko Mitsunaga	20	Parent's Day	

YBA

Cindy Yamada Thomas	20	Parent's Day
Chic Terashima	20	Parent's Day
Mas & May Akiyama	25	Parent's Day
Byron & Reiko Watanabe	20	Parent's Day
Ichiro & Takeko Doi	25	Parent's Day
Mits & Terry Fujinami	25	Parent's Day
Kenneth & Renee Matsuura	30	Parent's Day
Robert & Tami Tokita	20	Parent's Day

Junior YBA

Dean & Rise Hirabayashi	10	Sleepover
Paul & Kathy Terashima	25	Parent's Day

Buddhist Thoughts

Jean Shiba	30	
Helen Sato	200	In memory of Masako Suzuki
Joe & Mariko Kuwahara	25	

Temple General

Ivan Van Laningham	100	
Meditation Classes (2), cash	183	
Rev. Jerry Hirano, book sales proceeds	20	
anonymous, cash	395	In memory of Darcie Olsen
Brenda Kerr-Nielsen	50	In memory of Darcie Olsen
Ruth Amanda Neve	20	In memory of Darcie Olsen
Kevin & Naoko Sudoku	300	Wedding celebration, use of gym/kitchen
Nikkei Senior Center	30	Nikkei Luncheon, use of gym/kitchen
Ray Nishikawa & Diane Akiyama	20	
Terry Omura	50	
Mas & May Akiyama	25	Parent's Day
Sherrie Hayashi	25	Parent's Day
Elaine Ling-Fukushima	50	Parent's Day
Mark & Gail Minaga	25	Parent's Day
Brian Fukushima & Tammy Park	50	Parent's Day
Tracy Akimoto	25	Parent's Day
Jim Eng & Faye Mitsunaga	25	Parent's Day

Foundation Account

Alliant Techsystems	520	Donation from employee Ernie Kyed
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