

Forget Being Busy

We have entered into what many people call the busiest time of the year -Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. One of my Buddhist practices is to reflect on how the year has gone and certain recent events have forced me to think about them early.

It was just about this same time last year that I had to go home to Sacramento to conduct a memorial service for all the family members who passed away on my Mom's side. At the time our dog, Niko was still only a puppy. We knew we couldn't let him stay home because that would have been over 12 hours all alone in the house. If we had done that, I'm sure we wouldn't have a home to come home to. So we decided to take the Niko with us. We packed his bed, blanket, toys, leash, food bowls, and poop bags.

In the meantime, I prepared my dress clothes for the service along with my Minister robes, as I wanted to travel comfortably in my sweats and tennis shoes. Niko was very excited about the trip and we packed all of his things in the van. However, when we got to Vacaville, I realized that in the midst of being so focused on having everything for the dog, I forgot my clothes for the service. I was so mad at myself about being so careless. Luckily, we were just passing the outlet stores, so Linda, my wife, said, "Let's just buy some new clothes."

Fast forward to this year last weekend. We were heading back to Sacramento for my aunt's First Year memorial service. We knew we wouldn't return until well after 10 PM.

Although Niko is another year older, we knew we still couldn't leave him alone in the house all day by himself. So this time we made reservations for Niko to stay in a doggie hotel overnight. That morning, remembering what happened last year I went through a mental check list of all the things I needed to do: I packed Niko's bed and blanket, packed my dress shoes and socks in a bag with my minister robes. I put my dress slacks, shirt, tie and sweater on a hanger and placed it by the coat rack by the front door.

We had other errands to run before going to Sacramento. We dropped off Niko at the Pet Hotel with his blanket and bed. Then we bought lunch for us to eat with Linda's mom in Hayward. We had a wonderful Picnic lunch with her Mom at a nearby park.

We were fortunate in that the rain held up, but I still started to get a little chilly so I went back to the car to get my jacket. I opened the trunk and noticed that my green rain jacket was not in the trunk. I had the bag with my shoes and robes, but no jacket. Then I realized, that my dress clothes for the service wasn't in the trunk either. I did it again!!!! I forgot my clothes again. I was so mad again. Earlier, I had made a mental note not to forget my clothes. But I did it anyway. I couldn't believe it. We were just in Hayward, so did we have time to go back home, get my clothes and get to Sacramento in time for the service? It was cutting it too close. What should we do? We decided to get on the road, and once again, we stopped in Vacaville to pick up a new pair of pants, shirt, tie and sweater. Again.

Later that same week, as I was writing this article, I was thinking about that night's Sharks game at the HP Pavilion. Several weeks ago, a friend from the temple gave me 4 tickets to take my family to the game. It was just about this time last year that another person gave me tickets to a game just before Thanksgiving. At that time, 2 of my boys were home from college for the holidays and so I thought they might enjoy going to the game. Both boys were very excited since none of us have ever been to a hockey game.

As the puck drop time was approaching, I told the kids that they had better leave soon because of traffic. When I went to get the tickets, I couldn't find them. I looked everywhere. I looked at home on the dining room table where I normally place everything when I come home from the temple. They weren't there. I went back to my temple office thinking that I might have left them on my desk. They weren't there. I looked in my car; I looked in my bedroom; I looked in the garage. I couldn't find them.

I had to break the news to my 2 boys, that because I misplaced the tickets, they couldn't go. They took it well. I didn't find them until about 2 weeks later, when I was at a meeting at our Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. I must have placed them in my briefcase without thinking because I had completely forgotten that I had put them there.

Fast forward to this year. In preparation for this game and to make sure I wouldn't misplace the tickets, I gave them to my wife, Linda for safekeeping. I hope she knows where she put them.

These parallel events bring to mind two Japanese words that I think are related.

Isogashii, means busy and Wasureru means to forget. For the Chinese character, isogashii

(....., the left side .. is known as risshinben and it is an abbreviation of the characterkokoro), which means heart or mind. The right side (nakusu) means to lose. Similarly, Wasureru (.....also uses the same combinations of characters, to lose and mind or heart. In other words isogashii – to be busy and wasureru – to forget both mean to lose one's mind.

When we become busy, it is easy to forget. And it is precisely when we are busy, that we should take time to pause and reflect. In our Jodo Shinshu tradition, we have a method of practice called the Nembutsu. The Chinese character for nem is Nem also uses the character kokoro .. or mind or heart. But unlike isogashii and wasureru, nem is made up of the characters, ima .. or now. Butsu .. of course refers to the Buddha.

Thus one definition of Nembutsu can mean: for the Buddha to be placed upon one's heart and mind, now, in the moment. In other words, it is to become mindful and aware of the workings of the Buddha's Unsurpassed Wisdom and Boundless Compassion.

This is a busy time of the year. And if we get caught up in the busy-ness of the season, we often forget to see that our lives are embraced with the kindness of others. It is important that we take time out to reflect and be mindful of where we are, who we are with, and especially what we are doing in the moment of the now. If we are able to do this, I think we are beginning to live a life of appreciation and gratitude. So hopefully, before we get caught up in all the stress and tension of the holiday season, we can all take a deep breath and focus our thoughts and direct our minds toward the Buddha.

Or simply just recite Namo Amida Butsu to focus on the reality of the Now and awaken to the wonderful opportunity to be with one another. Have a Joyful Holiday Season.

Gassho,

Rev. Dean