

70-07-15

MORNING EKO IV

July 15, 1970

The last chant is dedicated to the monks or students who passed away, students related to the temple or monastery. For instance, last year Trudy Dixon passed away, and we had a memorial service the other day. But not only on memorial days, but also we recite a sutra every morning for the monks and students who passed away. And also for the parents or ancestors of the students, and our donors, and the people who worked for our country. That is the last service we have every morning. And it is *Eko* says, "*Aogi koinegawakuwa sambo, fushite shokan o tare tamae.*" "*Aogi koinegawakuwa*" means "looking upwards to the altar we pray," or "we ask for the Three Treasures; Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha." And the merit of reciting *Dai Hi Shin Darani* we dedicate to the monks and students who are related to us, and who passed away, and to the parents or ancestors of every student, and to the ancestors and parents of our donors, and to the people who worked hard for the country. And what we wish is that by the merit of reciting this sutra we want to help their practice and want them to encourage our practice." That is the meaning of the last *Eko*.

This kind of custom or dedication started in Buddha's time. If you read the scriptures you will read about many events. And on those occasions Buddha told his disciples to recite a sutra, or to make an offering for their parents. Maybe the first such event, as far as we know, was when a king asked Buddha to make an offering and to give a sermon on that occasion. That was the first event, maybe. After that, in India, it was a kind of custom to make offerings.

There are two kinds of offerings, alms giving and Dharma giving. Those are two kinds of offerings. To recite a sutra, or to practice, is a kind of offering to the people and to the deceased too. To make an alms offering to a priest was supposed to be the best offering. And on such an occasion Buddha would give them some sermon. And later we have, in alms giving, we have the offering of incense, offering of flowers, offering of light, and the offering of food. Those are the most important to Buddha.

To ask Buddha to come is the meaning of offering incense. When Buddha knew someone was burning incense Buddha would visit the family who made the incense offering and he would respond to their wish, and he would give a sermon. So incense is sometimes called a "messenger," not a messenger from Buddha, but a messenger from someone asking Buddha to come. That is the original meaning of offering incense. Later incense offering in which the fragrancy of incense pervaded everywhere meant Buddha's teaching, and Buddha's wisdom or Buddha Nature is everywhere; so the incense offering symbolized Buddha's inspiring activity. But originally incense was to invite, or to ask Buddha to come.

We offer flowers in a vase on the altar nowadays, but before, in India, they scattered flowers when Buddha came. Maybe that is more Indian way. I don't know. I haven't been to India yet, but I understand they are still observing that kind of ritual. In the

Vedanta society they offer flowers to the altar. That is the Indian way, but later, in China and Japan they offered flowers in a flower vase as we do here.

Water. When we drink water all the thirst will go. All the flame of many desires will clam down, so water symbolizes the wisdom which will clear up our mind, wisdom which makes our thirsty desires calm down. So water means wisdom.

And light, or candle also symbolizes the wisdom which will break the darkness of the ignorance. As you know, when we offer light and flowers, light is supposed to be a more important offering so we offer light on the left hand side and offer flower on the right hand side. That is more usual. And we offer water and incense in the center.

As you read in the *Lotus Sutra* there are four offerings or more. Food, medicine, clothing and bed. "Onjiki efuku." "Onjiki" is food. "Efuku" is clothing, and "Gaku" is bed. Those are also important alms giving.

In Japanese we say, "*Hokuyo itashimasho*." One of my members may come to me and say, "Tomorrow, or next week, is my mother's memorial day so we want to have "*Hokuyo itashimasho*." "Ku" means "offering." "To offer" is "Ku." "Yo" means "to encourage their mother's spirit to practice more," and "Yo" means "to give some nourishment, or encourage" is "Yo." In Japan I didn't like these services so much. But anyway, when they observed *Hokuyo* memorial services they would have a kind of party...not exactly a party, but they would provide various dishes for the priests. They invited the priests to give them some talk, or to give them some sermon, and they would offer food for the sermon. So still in China and Japan, whenever we observe memorial services for parents, or ancestors of members they would give us lots of food. They gave us so much that we couldn't finish it, so they would ask us to carry it back to our temple. When I was a little temple disciple I had a very difficult time taking all the offerings back to my temple. My teacher would leave as soon as he said good bye. And my duty was to borrow some box to put the various foods in, and to carry his food and my food. And if I was the youngest I would carry my elder disciples food too. Sometimes the members would say, "As it is so hot, how about this watermelon? Please carry it back." Sometimes it was a pumpkin. Watermelon is not so bad, but pumpkin is awful to carry. It is always rolling right and left on my back, this way and that way, because it is round. Watermelon is very smooth and it didn't hurt my back so badly, but pumpkin is awful, because it is rough. We say, "*Dekoboko*." "Boko" is "V" shaped, and "Deko" is "A" shaped. "*Dekoboko*."

Anyway, in Japan, in the country side, we observe memorial services in that way. They are very good people and they observe the way very sincerely without asking too many questions. Yesterday someone said, "That old-time religion was good enough for me." It is exactly so. They didn't mind what it was. "Old-time religion is good enough for me." But I was not so happy when I had to do too much about it.

And in Japan we also have *Ohigan* ceremonies. Do you know *Ohigan*? On spring and autumn equinox days almost all the families observe a big memorial service, and

each family makes an offering to my temple's Buddha. So if there were eighty families in my village, from eighty families Buddha would receive eighty offerings. Sometimes they were *Nochi* and sometimes *Dango*. *Dango* is rice ball. It originated in India. The Japanese people still observe the Indian custom of offering *Dango*. To make *Dango* you grind the rice, steam it, and make a rice ball. The Indian people, as you know, make a ball and eat it. So we still offer *Dango* to the Buddha. It is one of the important offerings to the Buddha and the family shrine. In Japan, actually we were too busy taking care of memorial services or funeral services and we didn't have much time to practice zazen even. Around the temples, mostly we have a big cemetery, and it was difficult to clean the cemetery of the families who had moved away from the village. Recently, in Japan, the people gave up their homes in the country to go to the city to work in order to have better jobs. So in the country there are many tombs stones. No one actually is taking care of them. So in autumn or on equinox days we were very busy. This is , I think, "*Kuyo*." Originally it had a deep meaning, but if we depend on alms-giving or preaching too much, forgetting the fundamental practice of zazen, Buddhism will be lost. I think in America Zen Buddhists will not be involved in such an activity so much. I hope not. But I think we should not forget our friends with whom we practiced, and who encouraged us, and who had a very good time with us. We shouldn't forget them. But I don't think it is necessary to have a big celebration, or to have a big memorial service for them. As Dogen Zenji says, "If you want to give alms, the cherry blossoms in the mountain will be a good offering." Even a cherry blossom in the deep mountain may be the best offering. So to have this kind of sentiment is important. But we should not be involved in that kind of activity too much, I think. Anyway, the last dedication is for our ancestors, and for priests and students who practiced with us, and for people who worked hard for our country and society.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 70-07-15
