

Rev. Yukawa, Interview March 5, 1992
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Interview with Reverend Kosho Yukawa, by Susan Stout, March 5, 1992, Tacoma, Washington. I met with Rev. Yukawa in his office at the Tacoma Buddhist Temple, 1717 South Fawcett Ave., Tacoma, Washington 98402. A second interview begins on page 13 of March 10, 1992. My words are in italics and Rev. Yukawa's are Tms Roman. The transcription begins with our discussion of traditions of the Tacoma Buddhist Temple.

You noticed that after some major services we serve meals and other refreshments. Many of the ladies are second and third generation. They still cook the same things, the same way without deviating from what their grandparents or grandmothers did and so I feel that here in this Temple the changes are very slow. In California, some Temples are using English translated sutra chanting. But here, I guess it depends on the minister too, but accepting that kind of change is slower.

And the ones here are in Japanese.

Yes.

So what is the meaning of the sutra chanting?

Well sutra chanting first of all is an expression of our gratitude to Buddha by using his words. Although they are translated into Chinese -- we are using a Chinese translation with a Japanese pronunciation. Technically, sutra chanting is to express our gratitude to Buddha using his words so to speak and also secondly, it is a form of meditation. Instead of sitting quietly meditating we orally chant so that through the chanting, in a way, we could just empty our minds of all thoughts. Just let everything go so that our minds are empty to receive the teachings. So usually chanting is done before the sermons, so you will be ready to listen. So these are some of the practices of chanting.

And is it the reason that it is called chanting is because it has certain tone?

Right, depending on the type of sutra or the scripture, we use different styles.

And you keep the rhythm? Is it the minister who keeps the rhythm going or do people understand which rhythm?

More common chanting they understand. The minister leads but they join in and chant together actually, but when it comes to more difficult ones, I think you have to have a

special training to chant, but still members will join in and try to follow as much as they can.

When I was talking to Mrs. Nakano, she mentioned that some of the gothas (songs) have a Christian feel to them. And she said that that's in the process of being changed to the Buddhist feel and the Japanese feel.

Music in the Buddhist service is a more American Buddhist. When we established here in America, we adopted the American -- the organ music, piano music. In the old tradition in Jodoshinshu services, there was hardly any singing. It was more of a chanting and listening to the sermon, that's all. But in America with adopting the Sunday School system which was not heard of in Japan, we have to incorporate more modern ways of conducting services, so these were adopted. When we first started there was no music, so we had to borrow from the Christian hymns and change the words. [laughter] Like Buddha loves you instead of Jesus loves you. There are many of those songs still remaining in our gathas, Buddhist songs, so gradually we are trying to eliminate them. More music is being written for Buddhist services now, so we are getting away from -- people come in and say, "Oh! I know that song! We sing that in our church!"

I guess my theme with regard to changes then can be maybe the way Buddhists come here to America and then some things you get from the culture that were already here.

That's right, actually our services really are in a way copy of the Christian Protestant type of services that we have adopted and incorporated into our services. Only thing remaining is the chanting and the incense burning. All the rest is really just like the Christian churches, isn't it?

Yes. When someone goes up to the shrine and makes an offering, that's just showing gratitude toward Buddha?

Yes.

And they just pick up pieces of incense and put it in?

Yes, see incense burning is a very long tradition of Buddhism. It probably started when the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni, was preaching. When a lot of people gathered in India in the warm climate, probably they had to burn something to purify the air or something like that, probably that's how it started. But it was quickly adopted to mean to

burn away evils and so forth. And then later on, I think it was adopted to mean to remind ourselves of one of the basic teachings of Buddhism called law of impermanency. Everything changes, right? Everything changes. So when you burn the incense it turns into smoke and then within a few minutes or so it disappears. And our life is just like incense. Sooner or later we disappear. So just like incense, our life is like that, so it is to remind us through the ritual burning incense that our life is like incense and that *now* is the important moment to establish the entrusting in Amida Buddha so we are assured of becoming Buddha. Tomorrow is not here yet and yesterday's gone. Moment-to-moment now is the important thing.

Okay, and you mentioned changes, I guess that's the part that I --

Oh, in Buddhism change is, in a way, cause of our suffering. See we don't want things to change. Well change includes basically first of all birth and death. That's change. Illness and old age. These are the four basic causes of suffering. It all deals with change so basically what Buddhism seeks or what Buddhists seek is to attain a life that has no change anymore, which we call infinite life. And Amida Buddha is of infinite life and infinite light, which means infinite wisdom and compassion -- no more changes. So there's no suffering. So by becoming Buddha we finally eliminate the cause of our suffering which is the perfect state as a Buddha.

That's not something we can attain then?

There are two theories to that. One theory says sure, yes, you could by practicing the various methods and physical training and purify oneself and finally reaching that state, which is called Enlightenment. In our particular sect, Jodo Shinshu sect says, well, try and see how far you could get. By trying, we realize with our ability it is impossible. If it is impossible, then are we turned off from attaining the goal of Buddhism? Then why practice Buddhism comes to question. No, our sect says instead of relying upon your own self power and ability, rely on some other ability which is already established for you and that ability and power was established by Amida Buddha, the Buddha we worship. Through his infinite wisdom and compassion he establishes, "I have done everything for you. Just trust me. Believe in me. Then you will be able to attain the life as a Buddha, not physically but the moment this life ends." But when we are able to establish the entrusting in Amida Buddha *now* realizing that at the end of this life, I'm going to become Buddha, then my life becomes peace of mind, happy and genuine, real and true life as a human being begins. This is the essence of Jodo Shinshu. So in our

sect we cannot say we are able to attain physically state of Buddhahood, only thing is we are assured of attaining the state of Buddhahood when this life ends. And when the life ends, it is not the end of everything, so we call this "rebirth" or "birth in the Pure Land" or "birth as a Buddha." So the life begins. So death in Jodo Shinshu is not a grave, all-ending nothing type of a scary thing. It's a new beginning. It's a life as a Buddha. Life as a true Buddha. So I think Jodo Shinshu Buddhists accept death more -- without fear, without worry, as much as some other religious teaching offers.

So is it Jodo Shinshu throughout the United States?

Well, we have about 60 temples throughout the United States. About 40 in the state of Hawaii. Our Jodo Shinshu after almost 100 years still is remaining as a Japanese American Buddhist Temple. Or to be very critical, it is Jodo Shinshu of Japan. It hasn't changed to Jodo Shinshu of America yet. You know what I mean. We are in a way in generally speaking in a very critical era, because the third and fourth generation are not following the tradition as much as the second generation. So the majority of our membership right now is second generation -- of *all* the 60 temples. The third generation, maybe 1/3 of the second generation.

Why do you suppose that is?

Well, maybe we haven't really so called changed to meet the meet the needs of the younger generations for the modern times. We haven't really pioneered to the American so called masses. Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism are very popular among the Caucasians. There are *hundreds* of centers around the country. But we have our purpose too. Our organization was established *for* the Japanese Americans to begin with and it still is. I think we are so called serving the needs of one ethnic group. So Jodo Shinshu religion itself is not strictly for Japanese American or Japanese or any particular ethnicity. It is for everybody. So eventually we have to expand, so to speak, to dissolve into the American culture.

Mrs. Nakano said you were very instrumental in bringing more people in to the Sangha (Brotherhood of Buddhists).

Well, I don't know about that, it hasn't changed that much. [laughter]

Oh, you don't think so?

Maybe. Children. There are more children here. When I first came there were about 4 or 5 children. There are about 30 children now.

So the children -- one person from each of the groups of Sunday School comes up and makes an offering too, is that similar to when people come in at the beginning [of the service]?

Right. Offering of incense is what they do representing each class of the Sunday School Class.

The Methodist Church down the street -- is that mostly Japanese Americans?

Yes.

Then how closely does the Methodist Church and the Tacoma Buddhist Temple work together?

We really don't. We support each other on fund raising types of things. That's about it. Program wise, we really haven't done anything together. There are other organized community organizations, like the Japanese American Service Organization that both the Christians and Japanese are all together in doing community service. There is a JAACL, Japanese American Citizens League, consisting of both members and non-members too that is involved in many things within the community. JAACL is more of a Japanese American citizens group, they are involved politically and so forth. But the Japanese American Service Organization is mostly Japanese-speaking people. They do a lot of things to enhance the relationship between Japan and America. People to people or sister-city program, that type of thing. There is another social organization, strictly socially getting together, so I think program wise, the needs to do things together are taken care of by mainly those two groups.

So you have two main fundraisers a year, one is the Sukiyaki Dinner and the other one is the --

Bazaar in November. Mainly food. Different types of food.

Does that bring in enough income then to support the [Temple]?

Not the entire operation of the Temple. Our Temple's finances are made up of three or four different categories. One is the pledge and is probably the major portion, one-third

or so. There is no set amount. Each individual will pledge what ever they want. Then the second is, we receive many donations. It is a Buddhist tradition for the family to donate on various occasions. One is, we conduct many individual family memorial services. It is a Buddhist tradition to observe the memorial for their deceased ancestors. For example after a funeral service, there is a one-year service, third-year service, the 7th, 13th, 17th, 23rd, 27th, 33rd and 50th. So beside the Sunday service, we schedule all this. So I conduct these family memorial services, maybe 3 or 4 a month or maybe sometimes 10 a month, depending on the schedule. So on those occasions they donate. At the funeral they donate, wedding, birth of grandchild, graduation of the son, and all these different occasions they donate. So that custom is maybe 1/3 or 1/4 of the income. The other will be the fundraising twice a year. Then at the major services, four times a year -- Shinran Shonin, Founders memorial day, Buddha's birthday, which is coming up April 5, the Obon festival service, and the perpetual memorial service in the fall. There are four times we send out special offering envelopes to all the members and they donate. So the four combined is about 1/4 of the income. So the four different categories make up the financial operations of the Temple.

So the offering that people bring in just before the service --

That's just offertory. Just like collection basket. They usually drop a dollar or so.

Is that like it was in Japan?

That's like in Japan, yes. Well, that's in the Christian churches too.

I was just wondering if that is where that particular custom came from.

Well, in Japan, I don't think they would pass a basket. They have an offertory box they just put it in. So the style or method is different but the concept is the same.

This area around here, the Kowasakis just sold their house to the University of Washington --

I don't think they have sold it yet. But eventually they will I think. They are moving out.

So I heard that that's the last Japanese family in the neighborhood?

We will be the last one. [laughter]

I guess that's one thing that has changed through the years.

Yes, that's a great change! Before the war, in 1941, when the war started, this Temple had about 400 - 450 families as members. It was a huge Temple. And they were all relocated to the internment camps. And after the war ended, only 1/4 of the Japanese Americans came back to this area, Pierce County area. So our membership from 400 - 450 after the war came down to about 150 - 160. That's about 1/4, 1/3 or so anyway. Before the war, Market Street and Broadway from about 19th to about 15th around there it was mostly Japanese shops, hotels and restaurants and laundries. Around here a majority of the residents were Japanese. So even after the war quite a few of them went back there but because of redevelopment, they gradually left. And across the street were mostly Japanese [the Temple is on 1717 South Fawcett] in the 50s. But by the time the 60s, when the second generation re-established themselves -- good jobs and so forth -- they all started to move out to better areas. And only the old timers remained in this area until recently. The Kowasakis are the last ones to remain because the mother insisted on staying here. She didn't want to leave until she died. They bought a nice home near the University Place. They bought a nice home, but the mother didn't want to move from this house she lived in for what, 60, 70, 80 years. So anyway after she passed away, they are cleaning up the house and they are ready to move. She passed away about three years ago.

What do you think is going to happen after --?

It is a very big question mark for our Temple with the University of Washington Tacoma campus. From the meeting we had with the officials from the UW, I understand they are going to concentrate on Pacific Avenue and 19th half way up the hill. That's the first phase of their establishing the campus. And this Temple and you know Kawasaki and this area will be the last phase. They are talking about a 20-years' project or something like that so it will be a long time coming. But you know the area that is designated as campus, we are included. This entire area really. So when Tacoma campus really becomes a very nice campus, whether right now, there is no word as to whether we have to move out when this phase starts and this area being used by the campus. I don't know whether we are able to stay or have to move out. There is no determination yet. But if there's a choice, we have to make a decision. Whether that is the right thing to do, stay here or move. So we really don't know. And I really don't know yet. We have to see how the campus develops and what kind of student activities there will be. One thing I could say, if we are able to remain and become part of the campus, it would be a unique

unique Temple! [laughter] Probably able to establish some kind of campus ministry. It would be exciting in one phase, but financially, I don't know how much we are able to withstand. That kind of program, we may have to get some support from the headquarters [Buddhist Churches of America]. And probably would have another minister to do the campus ministry. So we just have to wait and see how it is going to develop and affect us. I hope it does in a good way. One thing is, for certain, the area will be cleaned up. A lot of these houses will be torn down.

Have you been to the Japanese Language School like in the last couple of years?

No, I haven't.

I understand the new owner has it now and they found a whole bunch of books and different things. Have you had a chance to look at that?

No, Kawasakis actually owned that building. They sold it but the people didn't come through with the payment, so they repossessed or something and I don't know whether they sold it or not, I'm not sure. But Teddy Kawasaki has been telling me there are a lot of books, we should go in there one time and take a look at it. But we haven't had the chance.

It would be fun to go up there and look because that's a fantastic history in there too.

In August, they are going to have a Japanese School reunion. You should try to attend part of that. Well, I don't know how much program they are going to have. But at least the steering committee is formed and they are contacting all the students.

That's wonderful. Did you go to Japanese Language School when you were young?

When I was living in Los Angeles before we moved to Japan, for a year or so I went to Japanese School.

And after that were you involved with sports after school?

When?

Like first, second grade, third grade.

I don't remember going to sports in those days. This was before the war.

Most of the children did go to Japanese Language School after regular public school.

Right. Okay, I know what you mean now. Especially when they were in junior high school, high school age. I understand a lot of them went to Stadium because most of the people were in the district. And after Stadium [regular public school] was over, there were whole masses of them who used to walk from Stadium to this Japanese School. And not just a few, but hundreds sometimes. And so most of them were forced to go to Japanese School after regular school. So I don't think a lot of them participated in sports. Maybe there are some exceptions.

I noticed you have bars on the windows. Have you had any problems here? [The bars are on the lower windows of the minister's residence and on the Temple.]

Before.

Before you moved in?

Even after. After I came, only a couple two or three weeks after we moved here, we were burglarized -- our home. Lost half of our things. TV, video, my children's real nice bicycle. Real nice bicycle we brought from California. My wife's jewelry box and things like that. Then our Temple was burglarized a couple of times. What happened was they broke through the downstairs door one time. They didn't take much that time. We had some TV and video setups there. And the second time, we had some kind of service, maybe a funeral or something and when it was over I closed up and someone was hiding someplace. I was in my office and I heard this door shut, Bang! So I went out there. That's the door where they left, I think. And so I looked around and we lost the vases on the altar, they were washed and ready to put the flowers in in the kitchen. And I had my personal rock in beautiful shape. It was a decorative rock which was a present to me in California. Things like that he took. So after that we put up the fence and put the bars on. Since then it's been ok. After the fence, it's been ok. We used to have homeless people come down a sleep outside the door and down the steps. There is a eve there and they'd mess up the place.

We had our home burglarized -- not the home but the garage. And after that we got a dog and got a fence and we haven't been bothered since. I think you are right that maybe after the University comes in, it will get cleaned up. But still we still have a problem with displacing the community.

Right.

Ok, I appreciate --

Oh! You are welcome. Anything else you want to ask?

Can you think of anything.

What kind of class is this?

It's called Doing Community History. It's a history class and we pick a project. Like the last time I took this particular class, I picked Camp Harmony which was the Assembly Center at the Puyallup Fairgrounds and then I found someone who was interned there, Mr. Thomas Takemura, and so I interviewed him. My interview here is with Mrs. Nakano. She's been wonderful and then I was going to try to do a small history report on the Temple.

Oh, I see, Oh, good.

I've received a lot of information -- I've got the two history books that have been put together. Oh, I guess, one thing if I could ask you would be -- The different organizations, I noticed in the previous history books, they've got a lot of people in the different organizations and I can't see where they would be that big now.

No, it's not. Basically we have besides the Temple -- they all belong to the Temple but besides that we have the Fujinkai, which is the Buddhist Women's Association. It's a ladies auxiliary group. Then we have a group called ABA, Adult Buddhist Association and it's a small group, actually, it consists of both men and women. Then we have YBA, Young Buddhist Association, usually the high school age group, a small group again. Then the Dharma school, the Sunday School. Four organizations.

OK, do you still have the Boy Scouts?

No we don't.

When I was talking to Mrs. Nakano, she mentioned that when Reverend Pratt was here, some of the things that encouraged the boys to go to school [Sunday school] was they would have a special activity and I was wondering if you might tailor some other special

activity to draw people in. Not necessarily like the Boy Scouts, but some other to encourage people to come.

Well, mainly, like in Dharma School, we try to make Dharma School not just a Sunday Service and class but through Dharma School we have all kinds of programs for children. Outings and picnics and excursions. Often we have pizza luncheon type of a thing. Through that kind of activities together with the Dharma School, we try to draw the children out. When we get the children, we get the adults! [laughter]

There's a method. And it's true because I've talked to some of the people in the Sangha [congregation] and they said, "My children are coming now so now I come." Okay so you have the Fujinkai, ABA, YBA and Dharma School. Are there just a few children in each one of the classes? Are there different age groups for each class?

Yes, we have kindergarten, first and second grade together as one group. And the third and fourth grade together and five, six, seven together. And eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve - high school. So four different classes.

OK, so like one is called Lotus.

Right, Lumbini and Lotus. Lotus is the oldest group. And Meytraya is the five, six, seventh grade. [here we got out some papers] Oh, this group is Ashoka -- third and fourth. Back in the 50s there were a lot of children. Lot of children.

So about a fourth of the Sangha came back after the war and --

And see the families were young, so there were a lot of children. But these children after they grew up, hardly any of them stayed in Tacoma. They are scattered all over so that is one of the reasons why we have a small young generation here.

So there are how many Issei women left?

About four?

Mrs. Nakano said we could count them on one hand.

Right. Mrs. Ikeda, Mrs. Abe, Mrs. Osada, Mrs. Komoto, Mrs. Takehara. Oh, I'm sorry, there's a Dana group -- third and fourth is Dana. Fifth, Sixth, Seventh is Maitreya and Lotus.

*OK, Mr. Kosai is the president now. What kinds of things does he do? Is this his father?
[There was a picture of Mr. Yoshio Kosai in the 50th anniversary history book of the Temple.]*

Brother. He was killed in a car accident with an Issei couple, Yosh Kosai and Reverend Imai, the minister here before me. At Obon time they were conducting a cemetery service -- this is one thing we do during the Obon, it is a memorial time so we go to various cemeteries and conduct services -- and he was driving and on the way back something happened -- we don't know exactly, but probably Mr. Tamaki, who was riding in the back with his wife -- the elderly couple, probably had some heart attack or something. Something happened so he looked back and the car hit something and instantly he died. Reverend Imai was sitting in the front right seat sleeping. He broke his leg and survived. And the two others, Mr. & Mrs. Tamaki who were riding in the back, died within a day or so. It was a tragic thing. He [Mr. Yoshio Kosai] was the president at that time.

So what does the president do?

Well, conducts the Board of Directors meeting, first of all. He represents the Temple at various functions.

Is he the person that the University of Washington talks to?

I think he organized the committee to represent the Temple. He will make sure all the schedules run smoothly by making sure -- like the Sukiyaki, he has to find a chairperson. It is his responsibility to appoint or find, or beg. [laughter]

Yes, I'm in school PTA so I know!

My advice to the president of a Temple is more than anything else, show up at whatever function. He has to do public relations with the members. Harmony within the membership is important for the president to work on. We don't really have any problems but, it's important to keep them very happy.

Plus when you were in Fresno, he conducted the service.

Right, well, not because he is president. He's been doing that for years and years and years because of his studies that he has done in the past. And he is willing to do it too.

So there aren't a lot of these positions left, do you think? Do they have these kinds of positions still, like secretary?

Oh yes, we do.

So they just have their various duties.

Right.

I noticed you got new windows. The new stained-glass windows. That was for the 1990 -

Yes, for 1990, for the 75th anniversary celebration. Tacoma Buddhist Temple, 75th anniversary. We had various projects. Mostly the project was renovating the parsonage. Building the garage and remodeling the kitchen. As for the Temple, we did that stained-glass, actually it was a donation of the Kowasaki family -- Fujimoto -- there are three daughters from the Fujimoto family. Teddy Kawasaki is one of the daughters. In memory of their parents they donated the project. We made this room. [We were in a small library-type room just off his office.] And then we had a huge celebration service and banquet, youth sports program, golf tournament, all kinds of things.

So there is a sports program here?

Well, right now our YBA is getting together and practicing for sports tournament that is coming up, the Northwest District YBA once a year. They have basketball, volleyball and since our YBA members are only 5 or 6 of them, they still wanted to form a team so they are practicing.

Five is a team.

For basketball. [laughter]

I appreciate your time.

END OF SIDE ONE TAPE INTERVIEW WITH REVEREND YUKAWA

BEGINNING SIDE TWO INTERVIEW WITH REVEREND YUKAWA, MARCH 10, 1992

Today is March 10, 1992 and this is an interview with Reverend Kosho Yukawa and my name is Susan Stout and I am a student at the University of Washington Tacoma.

[Before I got the tape started I asked Reverend Yukawa when he was born. He said 1932. He had said that his family had moved back to Japan just before United States' involvement in WWII.] So you were never interned.

No. Our family moved back to Japan in 1940, a year and a half before the war.

Did your family sense that there were problems?

No -- well, maybe my father did. I don't know. What happened was you know he was a minister. After he finished school in Japan, he came over as a minister and served Tacoma Buddhist Temple where I was born. Then when I was a few months old, he was reassigned to Los Angeles Buddhist Temple and he served there from 1933 until 1940. In Japan, the Temples belong to the family and are usually hereditary. It passed on for generation to generations, so like our Temple, I don't know how many years we go back or how many generation we go back, but there are 15 - 20 generations serving this Temple and the membership. So my grandfather died very young when my father was in college, so my grandmother was running the Temple.¹ He was here and as my grandmother got old, I think he felt that he should go back and look after the Temple as well as he wanted to serve at the headquarters mother Temple in Japan.

Was that Kyoto?

Yes, Kyoto. It's a very large organization. It's the largest sect in Japan.

That's Jodo Shinshu?

Jodo Shinshu. And Jodo Shinshu is divided into two major organizations. One is called the West Mother Temple and the East Mother Temple. And our sect belonged to the West. Nishhi Hongwangi.

¹The Temple is located in Wakayama Prefecture in Japan. After the death of Rev. Kosho Yukawa's grandfather, a substitute minister took over duties. The leadership role was taken over by a minister who was sole survivor of his family at Hiroshima at the end of World War II. After a very thorough and careful process, this man was officially adopted into the Yukawa family. Rev. Kosho Yukawa's brother chose a profession other the Buddhist ministry. Rev. Yukawa is the second son who chose to minister to Jodo Shinshu Buddhists in America. When this type of situation arises or there are no children to receive hereditary role of minister, it is common to adopt. It may also be a nephew, distant relative, or in the case of an only daughter, her husband might take on the last name of the family and ministerial duties of the Temple.

Hongwangi, that's the name on the front.

Right, that's the name of the Mother Temple. Hongwangi comes from our Jodo Shinshu term, Hongwang or Hongan, which is translated as original vow or Hon means original or principal, Gan is a vow, and this teaching refers to the vow that was vowed by Amida Buddha to save all equally, all sentient beings regardless of what that person is. So based on that basic teachings of Jodo Shinshu organization is the Hongwanji. So our Temple originally was called Hongwanji all over but we adopted the local name of Tacoma Buddhist Temple to be more occidental.

So I noticed "Church" is on the front of the Temple. Do you plan to drop the "Church."

Yes, we officially have dropped the "Church" to change it to Temple. This has some historical background. When our organization in America, which we called Buddhists Churches of America with 60-odd numbered Temples -- when it was organized in earlier days, we go back to the first Temple organized in 1899, so that's the beginning of our organization in America. Our organization was the only Buddhist organization for the Japanese immigrant because a majority of the immigrants came from areas where Jodo Shinshu was predominant, so they brought their own religion. And after settling here, they wanted some religious affiliation and teachings to continue so they sent for ministers to our headquarters. And they sent -- and this was back in 1899, almost 100 years ago -- and they started to establish Buddhist Temples. Since it was the only Buddhist Temple, whether the people of different sect -- Zen sect, etc. -- they all came and we tried to accommodate all Buddhist rather than strictly saying we are Jodo Shinshu. So in order to bring that so to speak, they adopted a more general term as a designation of our Temple - - Buddhist Church of Tacoma or Tacoma Buddhist Church or Seattle Buddhist Church so that for anyone of different sect it would be easy to come. The majority originally consisted of Jodo Shinshu but I would say 40% were non Jodo Shinshu back home. But they came.

But isn't that still Temple for them though instead of "Church."?

Right, but to be more accepted in the American society was a very important thing for earlier Japanese immigrants and younger generation in those days. Not accepted -- to be **part** of this society. So they used a term like "church" and many other things we have adopted. Although we don't have it here anymore, but many of the Buddhist Temples used to have an American flag in the Chapel. And I thought, "How strange to walk into a

chapel with a flag." We had a Buddhist flag and an American flag, always. But recently a lot of temples are doing away with that. That was to show that we are part of the American society. So these are kinds of the earlier struggles that our churches or temples went through in order to be, you know, dissolved into the American culture and society and so forth. So it has kind of a historical background.

Right, plus after the war and during the war, a lot of Buddhist symbols were downplayed too.

Right.

And the old Indian symbol, the swastika, was on the front of the Temple.

Yes, that was a very common thing to use in Buddhist Temples. So like on the pews, they carved that and on the front of the Temples. They used to use that. But after World War II, because of the misinterpretation of the public, we tried to -- why create a controversy, so a lot of places did away with that. But still some of the things we cannot change and so still remains.

It has nothing to do with Germany.

No, it has not. It is the opposite, you know, the "L" is the opposite of the German swastika.

In a book I was reading about Buddhism, it explained that a lot of people in the United States who go to Buddhist Temples are not totally familiar with the Buddhist teachings. [Buddhism in America, p. 189] And I was wondering what is your opinion of the people who come to this Temple of their understanding of the teachings?

I think we have to look at it in two different ways. One is, when you talk about Buddhist teachings, it is very difficult for laymen to discuss exactly what the Buddhist teaching is. It is so vast. And generally, members of our Temple or any of our particular sister Temples have very difficult time explaining exactly what Buddhism is. So in that sense, the statement of the Buddhist members don't know their religion applies. But without making statements and saying this is how the teaching is and so forth in a systematic organized way to explain, I think our membership without really knowing sometimes -- and oftentimes, I should say -- know the teaching in terms of living it. And in their everyday action. And so I always tell the people, the members, that you know more than

you think you know. And I think Buddhism is "a way of life." And it is, it has to be a way of life rather than just a philosophy. Buddhism is not a philosophy, it's a teaching how to live it everyday. So in that sense, without really saying, this is it, they seem to live according to many of the teachings without actually knowing. Bodily, they might know, but intellectually, very difficult to explain. So you have to look at it two ways.

I see. OK. You don't remember anything about the Temple here when you were here.

No, I was just a few months old. But they remember me! [laughter]

Do you think your son aspires to be a minister?

Well, I have never impressed upon him to go into ministry, but deep inside my heart -- and probably my wife's too -- we'll be very happy [if he does]. As I said, back in Japan the first son has a responsibility to take over the temple regardless of whether he likes it or not so from the early childhood, he is been kind of trained and indoctrinated to accept the responsibility. It is a natural way of life for him. But like my father, you know, lived here for about 12 or 13 years or so before the war, and he sent us one by one to America when we were about 16 or 17 years old. "Get out of the house, and go to America." And so he never really said you have to. And I'm a second son. I'm not the oldest. My older brother never wanted any part of the Temple life. So he's an engineer. But I guess, I didn't feel the responsibility. This is what I wanted to do. It's a natural flow.

So you came here in about '46?

'49.

And you were about 16?

I was 16.

And you came over by yourself?

By myself. Started high school again. Or a junior in high school. I left Japan when I was just starting out high school. 10th grade, I think. So that's sophomore.

Did you know English?

No. [laughter] Not a word actually. I went to first grade in America before going back to Japan and so my brother and I used to speak English to each other. But less than a year

after returning to Japan, I think we had forgotten all about English and everything was Japanese by then. And during the war, for 5 years or so there was no mention of English of any kind, you know. We used to hide the fact I was born in America. All the other students will gang up on me. "Traiter!" and so forth, you know. Those were difficult years in Japan.

It was difficult for you in Japan and it was difficult for you here in the United States!

After coming back too, yeah. I had to work my way to go to school. Since then, I have been independent, you know.

Your wife wasn't a picture bride was she?

My wife?! No, she's American born.

Oh, so it was the Isseis who had the picture brides.

Yes, well not all of them. Some of them. That one goes back in 1910 and 1920, between 1910 and 1925 or so. [The Shashinkekkon (Picture-Bride) system era extended from 1908 to 1921. Buddhism in America, p. 22.]

Oh, I'm sorry.

Way before my time! Even as I'm this old! [laughter]

I was just wondering if you could tell me, when you say the Aspiration [during the service], it talks about Tathagatha. And I was wondering how does he fit in or --?

OK, Tathagatha is another name or sanskrit name for Amida Buddha. More philosophical name. In Buddhism, let's say, "Truth" and this truth is sanskrit is known as Tathata. It means true or oneness, any of the philosophical terms you want to use actually. So Tathata is **the** truth, absolute. Now, from the Jodo Shinshu understanding, we have -- to the truth there is no way from the relative world, we could have any kind of contact or relation with truth. There's no way we could explain even, truth, or to conceive what truth is. Impossible from the relative world, our world. So in Christianity, you could say this is God [Buddhist's Tathata] and this is man [relative world]. Now in Buddhism, in Jodo Shinshu especially, since we cannot have any direct relationship with the truth itself, because it's formless and colorless, we have to have so called, let's say, a mediator, so to speak, to have a form and a color so that we could

identify this. So what Buddhist teaching is that from truth, a form appeared, took place, through the process of cause and effect and this goes into much more detailed study -- we have a Bodhisattva who went through the cause of establishing various teachings and this is the vow that comes in. He vowed and he will become known to man. And after perfecting the vow, he became a form called Amida Buddha. And through Amida Buddha -- Amida Buddha took the characteristic of truth as it is and made it into a form called Amida Buddha, so that we could have a contact or relationship through Amida Buddha to understand the truth. So Amida Buddha is a representative or manifestation of the truth itself. OK, this word Tathagatha, now this word Tathata is the truth and Gatha means "come from" so this is the Tathagata, so from thusness or truth. So it is a Sanskrit term describing Amida Buddha. So it is the same. Alright? So when we use the word like Tathagatha or Amida Buddha, we are talking about the same Buddha.

Okay, I saw a show on TV and it talked about the Kami --

Kami -- God, OK

Is that something different?

Yes, this is again -- a lot of people even in Japan feel that God and Buddha are the same thing. But technically they are not. Usually when they say Kami, the English translation is God, but it's not the same God as the Christian God. Generally speaking when they say Kami, it refers to God. The Kami in Japan -- there are many different Kami. One is the spirit. Kami could be any spirit from anything. Desk, tree, mountain, you use the word Kami. And also the Shinto God, is always known as Kami. So Buddhism and Shintoism are the two major religions in Japan. So when they talk about Shintoism they always talk about Kami, God. When in Buddhism, it is always Buddha. So that is distinguished actually. So the Shinto God, or Kami, is a very spiritual kind of existence of soul in terms of Kami. So it's quite different.

And your experience is that some people can be Shintoists and Buddhists at the same time?

Yes, there are many in Japan.

And Shintoism is worshipping the Emperor?

Well, that was part of it before. Until World War II, the Emperor was regarded as a living God in Japan. **Living God.** So he was worshipped as a God, descendent of God. The Emperor's generation goes 50 or 60 generations, almost three thousand years it goes back. And the very first emperor was the descendent, of this God, that descended from the heaven. And they are traditionally known as a God, living God. But at the end of World War II, they say, "No, he's not a God anymore, he's just an ordinary human being representing, or a symbol of, Japan as a royalty." So he's not regarded as God anymore, but Shintoism used the Emperor to use the religion so to speak until then. So it has a political background.

And people actually believed that.

Yes, oh yeah. Well, when I was living in Japan during the war it was pounded in us! When the Emperor makes a trip, we used to kneel on the ground and you should never look up. You cannot see or look up. So when he passes by, everybody's bowing and nobody has seen him! He was treated in that kind of -- Living God-like. But not anymore.

Where did you go to school?

I went to school mostly in Japan, as I said, I went through second grade through junior high school in Japan. And I came here and finished high school and went to college in San Francisco. Then I got drafted during the Korean War. So after training, I was shipped to Japan again and Korea and I served two years. Came back then I decided to become minister then, so I went back to Japan for another five years. My junior, senior and master degree is in Japan. So most of my education is in Japan. So all my books, I read, it is much easier to read Japanese.

I guess there was one more thing I'd like to talk about if we could. What happened to the Temple during World War II? Was there anybody to watch?

I don't know exactly what happened here. From my birth, a lot of people stored a lot of things here and they just locked up the place and left and fortunately it was not burglarized and vandalized. Right after the camp when people came back, this became a hostile. Lot of families lived here, with partitions, until they were able to find a place to live, and find a job. So as far as the Temple, it was just closed up. So everything was intact. Many other temples throughout our organization, we heard of much vandalism and people losing everything and Temple things were taken away. Not too many

fortunately and sometimes very sympathetic friends of the Temple, you know, Caucasian, will look after and watch the place.

Reverend Pratt was here at the time.

Right. She was looking after the place more than anybody else for this Temple. It was fortunate that she was here.

I'm sorry I didn't have a chance to meet her.

Yes, me too. Especially because these people spoke [referring to a special memorial service to Rev. Pratt, where four of her students spoke in memory to her] the generations from the oldest to those whose language was English, so they were very close to Rev. Pratt. She was able to communicate. Until, actually, I'm the first one that has been a real English-speaking minister here. Although the one before me was raised in Japan, finished college and he came and picked up English quite well, but still it is very difficult. So to have Rev. Pratt all these years until the year I came -- she passed away just before I came -- so she was the teacher for the English-speaking people who were here.

So she interpreted what the ministers would say?

She studied it. She was a minister too. Oh, yes, she was designated as a minister of this Temple. She was self-studied. Remarkable person. The more I learn about here, WOW, she's really remarkable. Back in the 30s, early 30s, she started to come here. Probably around 1933. Right after my father left, I think she started to come -- or she moved to Tacoma. And in those days, a Hakojin, a Caucasian, a woman to say, "I'm a Buddhist." -- you know, even among her relatives and friends probably -- it was a very courageous thing to do. Not only was she interested, but she **lived** the life of a Buddhist **all** her life and continued to help the Temple and teach Buddhism to a lot of people. So many of the English-speaking members are really indebted to her as far as the understanding of some of the basic teachings of Buddhism goes.

That's wonderful. OK, I really appreciate your time. Thank you.

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