

## *Thoughts On Obon: A Transition*

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I was very lucky and am grateful that I was able to visit my mother in Japan to share our last few days together in a most joyous way. Last October, she was diagnosed with cancer. She chose not to have any treatment for it. Fortunately, she had no physical pain or suffering, having the quickly developing cancer. Around this May, her belly began to swell due to abdominal dropsy, but still she had no pain. Over the phone, she always sounded in a happy spirit. But, understanding her physical situation, I visited her. It was May 6, my birthday. It was my long and annual practice to call her in Japan on my birthday to tell her, "Thank you very much, Mom, for having me in this life." This time, I said say it seeing her face.

When first I saw her lying in bed, I thought she looked like a Kwan-In Bodhisattva. Finding me standing next to her, she was surprised and very happy. As if not wishing to waste any single minute, we talked a lot.

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With sparkling eyes, she said to me, "You know, I now see so many Buddhas on the top of Mt. Himalayas. Among those Buddhas, one is Amida Buddha. And I also see Amida Buddha extend the brightest ray towards me." She continued, "When I was younger and healthier, I never could understand what those bright rays meant. To me, they meant nothing. I did not feel anything special about those beams. But, now, I see clearly that that the light is for me. Now, I know that one of those shining beams is directed towards me! I can see it, now, only after I became sick and began to lie in bed like this."

A few days passed. Then, she told me, "Ma-chan (she called me this way.), Amida Buddha came right into my heart! The Buddha is with me! When I was young and healthy, I had dirty mind. I had greedy mind. But, now, the Buddha is reaching in my heart. The Buddha is and telling me that without having dirty and ugly minds we cannot live our lives. Now, the Buddha is reaching me and telling me that it is O.K. When you go back to your temple in America, please tell your Dharma friends what I said." She kept smiling quietly. She kept thanking each one of us. She kept shaking her hands with all those who visited her. It was magnificent that she could spend her last few days in such way. The rest of her time, she kept sleeping quietly.

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According to Dr. Okutani, her physician, however, her physical condition continue to deteriorate day by day, more and more rapidly than he had expected.

In Japan, families hesitate to ask some straightly forwarded questions to the doctor, but I did: "How many months do you think can she live?" Upon my question, he frankly answered me as follows: "I am sorry to say but it won't be even for several months. We should think it by weeks. We should think it would be for several more weeks. Probably around the end of May. At the last stage, she will probably have internal bleeding. At that time, she may lose consciousness and may experience a bit of discomfort. At that time, I may give her small dosage of morphine." my brother-in-law, Dr. F. Ukai, that she may be able to live only for more few weeks.

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My schedule to stay in Japan was limited. I knew that I could not be with her forever. My air ticket said my departure was May 11<sup>th</sup>. On that day, I visited her once more before rushing to the airport. I held her hand tightly, rubbed her feet, kissed her forehead, and said, “Mom, I won’t see you again in this life.” She looked at me, then, quietly nodded. Then, she smiled. It was a sad smile. But, it was a smile of truth. It was a most solemn moment for both of us. It was also a moment of powerful assurance that she was with the Buddha.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, I called her from the U.S.. According to Satomi-san, my sister-in-law, her feet and belly were even more swelling, but she kept her mind very positive. Over the phone, she said to me, clearly and slowly, “Ma-chan (my name), I am so happy, so happy, and so happy (*URESHIKUTTE, URESHIKUTTE, URESHIKUTTE, SHOUGANAINOYO*). Thank you, thank you, and thank you!” In this way, she assured her profoundest joy and thankfulness. But, I did not forget what her doctor had said, “She may lose consciousness.” With some courage, I called her. It was May 20<sup>th</sup>. I said, “Mom, don’t ever lose the sight of Amida Buddha’s Light.” Then, she immediately responded very crisply, “*HAI (Yes, Madam)!*” Wow! I felt. What a powerful reply! She sounded like a Japanese elementary schoolgirl answering her teacher after being commanded to do something.

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On May 29<sup>th</sup>, she seemed to have a minor discomfort, but could eat a small amount of fruits. When I called her later again, she had just woken up from her deep sleep. She could not speak easily. She had to stop often while talking. Her voice was low and feeble. I could hardly hear her. Then, she said, “My body is becoming weaker and weaker. But, don’t worry. I can still talk. Thank you, thank you, thank you.” On the same day later, when her doctor visited and asked her how she was doing, she answered, “Everything is O.K.! (*NANIMO KAMO IIDESU*)” According to Satomi-san, this was her last word. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, she returned to the Land of Amida. I thought she had a magnificent transition. I wished I could leave here like she did.

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Her life was not easy. When she was 48, she lost her husband. She had always been a strong Buddhist, but after that she became even more devoted in Buddha-Dharma. Her entire life began to be fully focused on Buddha-Dharma. In front of our large O-Butsudan in the Buddha-Room in our house, she used to do two-hours of chanting each for every morning and evening. She was a book worm and read only books on Buddhism. She did *O-Shakyo* (Handwriting Buddhist Sutras with a brush) whenever she had time. She visited so many temples whether in snow or in rain. She was not a scholar or a specialist on Buddhism, but several times, attended the world religious conferences held in Vatican. As a pilgrimage, she traveled to India more than once. Before she became a widow, she never had bought even a train ticket herself since her husband did everything for her. But, the power of Dharma turned her into such a powerful woman! She lived a true Buddhist way of life much more than myself. By the power of Buddha-Dharma, she had a greatest life and a magnificent death. Thank you, Mother, for teaching me so much through your life and death.

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Gassho,

Shoyo Taniguchi, Ph. D.

*Buddhist Poem for You*

My beloved one has left, but her gentle smile has not left.

My beloved one has left, but her kind words have not left.

My beloved one has left, but her warm-heart has not left.

My beloved one has left, but she always comes back to my hands of Gassho.