

Environmental Bon Odori ?
By Rev. Don Castro

On March 10, many of us had the opportunity to meet Nobuko Miyamoto at our Sunday Dharma Exchange and view three of her wonderful environmental music videos which I urge you to view on You Tube: BYO CHOPSTIX – MOTTAINAI – CYCLES OF CHANGE. Nobuko is a professional singer, dancer and dance instructor who, among other things, has worked with Rev. Mas Kodani at Senshin Buddhist Temple in L.A. to create English Bon Odori. Her arts organization is called Great Leap.

Before coming to Seattle where she was honored at the “Women Who Rock” (UN)CONFERENCE AND FILM FESTIVAL, Nobuko wrote to me, “When I performed for the World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne, Australia in 2009, the message of the indigenous people from round the world was ‘Do something about the environment!’ That started me on a journey. In 2010 we started creating our first Eco-Vids, environmental music video, which are distributed through YouTube.”

In addition to her “Mottainai” video, Nobuko has created a “Mottainai” Bon Odori dance “which has been done at the last 2 Obons by all the temples in the Southern District, maybe 10,000 people. We are pleased that children like the song and now know its meaning and talk to elders about it.” Fortunately for us in the Seattle area, Nobuko will be returning to Seattle for another event and, during her time here, she has made available the evening of Wednesday, April 17, to come to the temple and teach the Mottainai Bon Odori dance to anyone who is interested. The time for the instruction will be 7:30pm at the temple. The room location is still to be worked out.

The expression “mottainai” has a lot of layers of meaning but the best explanation I’ve seen is contained in the book “Namo Amida Butsu” by the late Rev. Chijun Yakumo who served Seattle Betsuin from 1970–1977. A deep appreciation of the expression can’t help but lead us to Jodo Shinshu for, as Yakumo sensei wrote, “...we are allowed to live solely because of the sacrifices of other living things...For me, there is no way to truly appreciate the lives I consumed other than to devote myself to becoming a Buddha; otherwise, my living this life sustained by their sacrificed lives would truly be mottai–nai.”

P.S. Since my newsletter article this month is so short, I want to share with you something I read this week that, remarkably, coincided with the selection of a new pope for the Catholic church: Pope Francis (named after St. Francis of Assisi). The Christian gesture of the hands in prayer is borrowed from the Indian “Anjali” or “Gassho.” Until the time of St. Francis of Assisi, the gesture of Christian worship was the hands outstretched to the sides as you see many

charismatics do. St. Francis is said to have adopted the Gassho upon seeing it in use in the Holy Land among religious groups influenced by Indian Buddhism.