



From One Drip to Another By Rinban Don Castro

We just concluded our Northwest Buddhist Convention hosted by White River at the Doubletree Hotel at Southcenter. One of the highlights of the weekend was a five foot tall ice sculpture of Amida Buddha surprisingly well detailed. It seemed everyone wanted to have their photo taken in front of the gleaming sculpture that had lights shining through it and surrounded by flowers at its base.

My banquet table was quite close to the sculpture and I couldn't help looking over frequently to watch the melting statue with the water dripping into a basin filled with flowers and chunks of ice. It was quite beautiful until Amida's hand turned into a claw and then disappeared. The deformation of the ice sculpture reminded me of the lepers of Molokai losing their limbs and then I thought how Amida is there in Molokai too. There is an Amida for lepers and, of course, if they create his statue, he will look like them (incidentally, this tendency to "humanize" Amida is why Rennyo Shonin emphasized the six character name as the central object of reverence).

With Nirvana Day, February 15, the first day of the convention, the ice sculpture reminded me of the Buddha's final instructions to his disciples where he tells them not to get attached to his mortal body but to let the Dharma be their guide. To see the Dharma is to see the Buddha and to see the Buddha is to see the Dharma. To see the melting Buddha is to see the Dharma of Impermanence.

Tibetan monks skillfully and patiently construct elaborate "sand mandalas" often spending weeks and using semi-precious materials. After completion, rituals are performed and the mandala is swept away, a lesson in impermanence. When it is all said and done, sand mandala or ice sculpture, the essential lesson is the same although the process of teaching the lesson is quite different: the sophistication of the monks on the one hand (complicated teachings are for complicated people) and the Shin Buddhists hiring a fellow with a chain saw to carve an ice sculpture of Amida on the other hand. I really liked the ice sculpture...drip!...drip!...drip!...and I heard the ice sculpture call my name!