

Happy New Year – Akemashite Omedeto!

2553 B.E. (Buddhist Era)

From the Parinirvana (death of the Buddha)

From May to May by the Lunar calendar

2010 C.E. (Common Era)

From the Birth of Christ

Heisei Nijuninen

22nd year of the Heisei Emperor's Reign



Kinnara Gagaku

## Hanging a Bell in the Empty Sky

Happy New Year!!! Last year Kinnara Taiko & Gagaku celebrated its 40th year here at Senshinji. And this year, I begin my 42nd year at Senshin, where I have spent more than half my life. It's like growing up with a huge family – 100 aunts, 100 uncles, 74 grandfathers, 75 grandmothers, 100 brothers and sisters, and and hundreds of children and grandchildren. Unlike the standard Sangha of monks and nuns, our Sangha is huge, unwieldy, seemingly chaotic, cantankerous, critical of others, supportive, caring, cooperative, and fun-loving – all rolled into one. Our Sangha is our practice, not the practice of individual nuclear families, but a whole community, a commuter neighborhood, trying to hang a bell in the empty sky.

Hanging a bell in the empty sky is impossible, a ridiculous image from a normal point of view. But Buddhism is not normal, nor can it be applied to a normal world. It is a commentary on the normal as an aberration, normal and “real”, but an aberration nevertheless. A bell hanging in the empty sky points to that same normal world from another point of view – a natural point of view – where the seemingly magical happens. It is the world of the non-calculating self where opposites meet in harmony, where what was agitating at

one moment becomes the seed of serenity in the next, where the topsy-turvy and the paradox become reality.

The ego-self creates the normal world, from the 19 hells up to and including the many realms of heaven. And seen from the standpoint of the ego, it is the “real” world of good and bad, of right and wrong, of true and untrue. the ultimate adversarial stance. The condition of egolessness is the Nirvana world where all “for vs. against” no longer holds, where “real” and real come together, where namo and amidabutsu become one. Hanging a bell in the empty sky is doing the seemingly impossible = impossible from the normal point of view, real from the natural point of view. It is like the equally Buddhist Japanese proverb: “Leaves sink, and rock flow downstream” (Ishi ga nagarete, konoha ga shizmu). It is normal for rocks to sink and leaves to flow downstream, but it is natural for leaves to sink and rocks to flow downstream. The latter, natural world, is the world of religion - or at least the world of Buddhism. Here's to continuing to trying to hang a bell in the empty sky. Kampai.

Gassho,

*Rev. Mas*