

RINGING THE JOYA BELL BY REVEREND GENGO AKIBA

The 108 tolls of the bell represent the 108 bonno created in the past year by human beings in the process of living of which they are both aware of unaware. All human beings create bonno in the process of living. The meaning of the 108 bonno can be simplified by this statement: "All living creatures are born with genes of self-reproduction and of self-centeredness." This is a statement by a respected microbiologist, but this belief also coincides with Buddhist teachings. Activities related to simply living and maintaining life creates bonno and mumyo. The meaning of mumyo can be translated as mu meaning nothing and myo as light; in other words, "no light," or ignorance. But all wise people are living human beings and each are holders of bonno. A translation of bonno can be broken into three categories: greed, anger, ignorance. Greed branches out to many branches and sub-branches, as do anger and ignorance. In living a normal and regular life, all of us are constantly burning the flame of this bonno.

However, human beings who completely understand themselves use the energy of bonno to change it to creativity. In the West, this activity is commonly translated as intelligence, reasoning and understanding. Buddhism simply speaks of bussho or buddha nature and wisdom. All followers of Buddhism offer prayers before Shakyamuni Buddha. "The hope and promise to eliminate dangerous bonno." They then try to practice and devote their life to this promise. The deep and sonorous sound of the temple bell awakens people to the meaning of bussho and wisdom, traits that already are within us. Temple bells reactivate these uplifting qualities.

When you are ringing the bell, please give your thoughts or prayers for purifying the world and awakening the good Buddhist nature and wisdom in all. Ring with the wish that the sound you make and the power of this temple bell will help eliminate darkness from the world and bring peace to the world in 2020.

Reverend Akiba is the bishop of Soto Zen Buddhism in North America and head of Oakland's Kojin-an Temple and Los Angeles' Zenshu-ji Temple.

ABOUT THE ASIAN ART MUSEUM TEMPLE BELL

The bell was made by Tachibana Kyubei for Daienji Temple in Tajima province, Japan, in 1532. Design and construction of the bell tower was made possible by the Henri and Tomoye Takahashi Foundation with additional support provided by Hitachi America, LTD, in 2002.

The inscriptions on the bell include Buddhist texts and information about the bell's creation such as the artist's name, date and temple name.

The following verses are in raised text alongside the figures of the four guardian kings of the east, south, west, and north in the four squares that surround the bell. They come from the Nirvana Sutra and express the essence of that text.

*All things lack permanence
This is the law of birth and death
Extinguish birth and death
Cessation leads to bliss*

These larger inscriptions appear in raised text on the front and back of the bell in a single vertical line. They seem to rise up out of lotus blossoms.

*Praise Amitabha Buddha
Praise Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva*

This text is carved into the bronze on the right side of the bell. This is chanted after reading a sutra aloud. Reading the sutra created merit and this invocation passes the merit on to other beings who are suffering so that they can attain liberation.

We vow to confer our merit on all beings equally May one and all attain awakened mind, be born in the land of bliss.

—Translations by Melissa Rinne, former associate curator of Japanese art, Asian Art Museum