What is Stupidity?

Two Sundays ago, for my Dharma message, I mentioned about three poisons of blind passions which are greed, anger, and stupidity. After the zoom service, I joined the Dharma school class.

The class was proceeding with my Dharma message. During the discussion, someone asked about the meaning of the three poisons. Just when I was about to give an answer, a question arose from my mind: “How would I describe stupidity in English?” I had an abstract image of it in my mind, so unconsciously I translated stupidity to “oroka” in Japanese because Master Shinran often describes the ordinary beings’ humanity with foolish being. I was, however, not sure that my interpretation of stupidity was close to that of the other participants whose main language is English. So, I asked what stupidity is. Someone replied that stupidity could be also mean ridiculousness.

Since the closure of the temple, watching TV is one of my daily activities because from TV programs, I can learn many kinds of English conversations such as daily chatting, describing a specific topic such as hobbies, storytelling, and news in English. At the night of the Dharma discussion, when I tune in for TV, I found a program named “Ridiculousness.” I thought “that’s it!” and stayed on that for a while. In this program, there are three stars. The main content of it is to show something funny short videos, which seemed to be uploaded onto social media, and these stars make fun of it after watching the videos. Some people in the videos did aggressive and dangerous activities that came off as funny. Watching these videos, unexpectedly, I said in Japanese, “how stupid”

Japanese comedy is a huge part of Japanese culture. Particularly in the Kansai region, where comedy sketches are popular, being called “stupid” is an honorable title. Being called stupid back in my friend’s hometown Osaka, was a sign that they had a great sense of humor, similar to the Japanese comedians.

According to the Teaching of the Buddha, our actions caused by our stupidity makes us apart from our enlightenment. The Buddha enables us to realize about our foolishness because we act, speak, and think without realizing possessing stupidity in our minds at all times. In Buddhism, such blind actions are called ignorance that we don’t know what the true and fake is. The ignorance obstructs our path to enlightenment. Hence, in the eight-fold path, which is the
practice to be performed to attain Buddhahood, it is taught us to break our ignorance by possessing right view at first.

However, for us, ordinary beings, it is not easy to see things as they are because we use many ways to recognize the world through our vision, communications, and so on. We don’t always tell the truth correctly like the meaning of “stupid” turns to be good and bad corresponding to the context. Unless using them, we can’t get closer to the truth.

That’s why Amida Buddha compassionately revealed the true teaching and manifested Truth itself with the Pure Land, guiding all beings with Name; namuamidabutsu.