

Buddhism and the Concepts of Grace, Bounty and Blessings

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The terms *onkei* (bounty), *oncho* (grace), *mimugumi* (blessing) and *keitaku* (providence) often appear in the Baha'i writings and prayers. The average Japanese person will have some idea of what *onkei* (bounty) and *mimugumi* (blessing) mean, but *oncho* (grace) and *keitaku* (providence) are rarely used. Although the Chinese characters used to write these words give us some hint of the meaning, most Japanese will not know what the difference between these two terms is, nor will they have an understanding of what they really mean. Perhaps this is because Buddhism does not contain the concepts of bounty and blessings. The Japanese notion of bounty may be best expressed in the proverb "*Tana kara botamochi*," which literally means "Sweet rice cakes falling from the shelf"—a bit like "manna from heaven" or "Larks flying into your mouth already roasted." That is, the term refers to a stroke of unexpected good luck that comes one's way without any effort on the part of the recipient. This is far removed from Baha'u'llah's use of the term "bounty," which includes such calamities as almost unbearable suffering, unexpected death, and the loss of life in natural disasters. For Japanese, the notion of bounty is inextricably linked to the falling rice-cake kind of faith in the benefits of our present life. This presentation will consider the meaning of such grace.