

Message on the Completion of the Inner Altar Restoration of the Hall of Amida Buddha at Hongwanji

Nearly 800 years have passed since Shinran Shonin established the Jodo Shinshu teaching through clarifying that the Primal Vow of Amida Tathagata is the aspiration for saving all living beings. In transmitting this teaching over many generations, the Hongwanji Temple was founded as the fundamental gathering place for those who appreciate Amida Buddha's working through the recitation of the nembutsu. It has been carefully maintained as the center for appreciating the teaching to the present day by all nembutsu followers of the Hongwanji community throughout the world.

The present main worship hall, the Hall of Amida Buddha, was erected in 1760. After 200 years following its construction, the roof had deteriorated, and so the structure underwent a grand-scale restoration over five and a half years, commencing in 1979, which included re-roofing work and the installation of disaster-prevention facilities. The latest renovation, which began in August 2017, is scheduled to be completed in March 2022. For this project, a variety of decorations of the inner altar as well as the *Yoma* and *San'noma* side rooms are undergoing substantial refurbishment, and other repair and recoloring restoration work is being carefully carried out.

Through this restoration, we are able to pass down to the next generation this precious space for receiving the Dharma, as well as preserving an important cultural asset that was established, maintained, and cherished by our forebears. I am truly grateful that we are able to complete this great undertaking thanks to the tangible and intangible support and contribution from all of you, as well as the financial aid for cultural properties from the Japanese government. All of this was made possible under the guidance of the Buddha and Masters.

As human beings, we are unable to realize the true reality of everything around us, as Śākyamuni Buddha expounded through his teachings, namely, impermanence, no-self, and dependent origination. We are unable to see things as they are because of our own self-oriented mind, which traps us in constant suffering. The compassion of Amida Tathagata looks upon us with sorrow and benevolently embraces us. Being illuminated in the Light of the Buddha, which is the embodiment of great wisdom, that is, the working of the Primal Vow, we are enabled to be aware of our true state as sentient beings who are filled with ignorance and self-oriented passions. This awareness guides us to recognize and come to appreciate Amida Buddha's liberating working that always includes each of us. Then, out of gratitude for the Buddha's benevolence, we naturally begin to take measures that distance ourselves from egocentric and selfish actions that create further sorrow. This is how we are guided to live as a nembutsu follower.

Based on this way of living, and in an effort to share the Buddha Dharma in a more approachable way, I composed the work "Gratitude for the Jodo Shinshu Teaching," presented on the occasion of the Commemorative Service of the Establishment of the Jodo Shinshu Teaching, observed this past April. Scheduled for next April is the Celebratory Service to Commemorate the Completion of the Inner Altar Restoration of the Hall of Amida Buddha. Through upholding Shinran Shonin's teaching and constantly reflecting on ourselves as foolish beings filled with selfish desires and attachments, we come to feel gratitude for the working that Amida Buddha extends to us out of great compassion. In today's world where we see so much social division and discrimination occurring, let us respect and support each other while spreading the Dharma and enlarging the circle of fellow nembutsu friends.

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SHAKU SENNYO
OHTANI Kojun
Monshu
Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha