

Message on
“Gratitude for the Jodo Shinshu Teaching”

This year we will once again have the opportunity to observe the Commemorative Service of the Establishment of the Jodo Shinshu Teaching together. This service’s name, ‘Establishment of the Jodo Shinshu Teaching,’ refers to Shinran Shonin’s systematical presentation of the Jodo Shinshu teaching through his main writing, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, or *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*. In this work, he clarified how Amida Buddha’s compassionate working, or Other Power, reaches and guides each of us. This annual observance is a great opportunity for us to deepen our gratitude for the teaching.

The founder of Buddhism, Sakyamuni Buddha revealed the reality of this world as “everything is changing” and “all things are without self.” However, ordinary beings like us are not able to accept this reality, and that is why we struggle constantly. Typical examples are the four difficulties expounded by Sakyamuni Buddha, that is, birth, aging, illness, and death. We, who possess blind passions of greed, anger, and ignorance, cannot escape from suffering until the moment that life ends.

Shinran Shonin used the expression ‘foolish beings filled with blind passions’ to describe us, those who are not able to accept this reality. Amida Tathagata wishes to save us, who are drowning in the darkness of blind passions, and continues to work with compassion in the Nembutsu, “Namo Amida Butsu.” As Shinran Shonin wrote in a hymn,

Karmic evil is from the beginning without real form;
It is the result of delusional thought and invertedness.
(*Hymns of the Dharma-Age*, Verse 107)

The compassion of the Tathagata is grounded in true reality, which begins to work prior to human cognition, and thus embraces all life equally and takes it as it is without abandoning anyone.

Shinran Shonin described his understanding in another verse as “attaining Buddhahood through the nembutsu is the true essence of the Pure Land way.”

Since shinjin [entrusting heart] arises from the Vow,
We attain Buddhahood through the nembutsu by the [Vow's] spontaneous working.
The spontaneous working is itself the fulfilled land;
Our realization of supreme nirvana is beyond doubt. (*Hymn of the Pure Land Masters*, Verse 82)

Jodo Shinshu is the teaching that we will attain enlightenment beyond form and become buddhas in the “Pure Land of naturalness” through shinjin alone. In shinjin we accept without doubt the heart of Amida Tathagata’s Vow of “Namo Amida Butsu” – “Entrust yourself to me. I will liberate you just as you are”

When we are touched by this warm compassion and learn of Amida Tathagata’s wish for our life,

we are empowered to live at ease, share joy and sadness with people, and a world of mutual respect and support opens up. With ease and joy, Shinran Shonin walked the path of gratitude for being saved by Tathagata's compassion. Aspiring to learn from his way of living and transmit his teaching to the next generations, I would like to express the essentials of the Jodo Shinshu Teaching in the following passage.

Gratitude for the Jodo Shinshu Teaching

Namo Amida Butsu.

“Entrust yourself to me. I will liberate you just as you are.” This is the calling voice of Amida. My blind passions are embraced in the Buddha's awakening, So the Buddha calls to me “I will liberate you just as you are.” Gratefully responding to the Buddha's call, I find that I am already on the path that leads to the Pure Land. And the Nembutsu flows freely from my thankful heart.

Living with the Dharma as my guide
Softens my rigid heart and mind.
Gratitude for the gift of life I have received
Frees me from becoming lost in greed and anger,
And allows me to share a warm smile and speak gentle words.
Sharing in the joy and sadness of others,
I shall strive to live each day to its fullest.

In 2023 we are going to conduct a Joint Celebration of the 850th Anniversary of Shinran Shonin's Birth and 800th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Jodo Shinshu Teaching. In gratefulness for the birth of Shinran Shonin and his expounding of the teachings of Jodo Shinshu, let's recite “Gratitude for the Jodo Shinshu Teaching” together, work together, and live a life of Nembutsu together to spread his teaching. As for “Our Pledge,” delivered in my Dharma message at the 2018 Perpetual Memorial and Autumn Service, it is my hope that it will continue to be recited by everyone on various occasions, particularly by young people and those who are not familiar with Buddhism or Jodo Shinshu, and that it will lead to closer connections with the teaching.

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