

**Shinran Shonin's 750th Memorial and
Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii's 120th Anniversary
Commemorative Service**

Honolulu

I am truly grateful and pleased that we could observe the service to commemorate Shinran Shonin's Seven-hundred fiftieth Memorial and the One-hundred twentieth anniversary of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii.

Shinran Shonin's ninety years of life spanned the late twelfth century to the mid-thirteenth century. He spent his whole life studying thoroughly the Buddha Dharma that was transmitted to Japan from China and revealed to us the teaching in the form that has been made available to everyone. The distinguishing feature of Jodo Shinshu, which was expounded by Shinran Shonin, is the importance that is placed on words. This attitude is vastly different from that of other schools of Buddhism which place emphasis on meditation and following precepts. Shinran Shonin taught us the importance of actualizing and realizing the Buddha Dharma in our everyday, secular life.

The most fundamental word in Jodo Shinshu is "Namo Amida Butsu," that is, the Name of Amida Tathagata whose wisdom and compassion is limitless and immeasurable. The working of Amida Tathagata reaches us in the form of the Name, Namo Amida Butsu, and with its wisdom and compassion, enables us to attain birth in the Pure Land. Namo Amida Butsu reaching us and our acceptance of it is known as *shinjin*, that is, our receiving the heart that entrusts to Other Power. This entrusting is not realized if we are the subject that is attempting to believe in Amida Tathagata as our objective. Rather, it is the Tathagata who is urging us to accept and receive this working. It is similar to the emotional response that arises in us, which transcends reasoning, when we see beautiful artwork or hear exquisite music.

Shinran Shonin expresses the working of the Name in a *wasan* as follows,

The Buddhas, countless as the sands of the Ganges or as particles,
Reject the small good of the various practices
And all alike wholeheartedly encourage beings
To realize shinjin that is the inconceivable working of the Name.

Words to explain the meaning and significance of the Name are indispensable in order for us to realize and correctly accept that the working of Namo Amida Butsu alone is necessary and saves us. Through words, specifically, by listening to Dharma talks and reading books on Buddhism, it is necessary for us to come to realize that we are persons who, having lost sight of the truth, are being led astray by our own desires, and that we are saved by Amida Tathagata through the working of Namo Amida Butsu. Although people of today have an abundance of knowledge, we use it to expand our self-centered desires and to make our lives more convenient and materialistically abundant. We need to take another look at this arrangement and correctly

receive the intent of the Jodo Shinshu teaching. Words alone, however, cannot resolve this.

I have heard some say that they feel something is lacking in Jodo Shinshu since there are no prescribed Buddhist practices. I, for one, do not feel the need to have to engage in any particular practices because human life itself is difficult enough to be regarded as a challenge. It goes without saying that we have to experience such things as old age, sickness, and death in this world. In addition, there are quite a few cases in which good intentions sometimes cause trouble to others, children die before their parents, or a war that was begun in the name of justice resulted in taking the lives of many, both friend and foe, and furthermore caused for more hatred and animosity to arise. We are nurtured to become practitioners of the Nembutsu through living our lives earnestly, encountering wonderful predecessors who live the life of the Nembutsu, and other various causes and conditions. Let us accept the compassionate working of Amida Tathagata, who cannot help but always be concerned for us, never abandoning us, and is always calling out to us. In response, let us live our lives to the utmost, saying the Nembutsu.

Shinran Shonin encourages us to do so, as written in the following *wasan*.

Those who deeply entrust themselves
To Amida's Vow of great compassion
Should all say Namu-amida-butsu constantly,
Whether they are waking or sleeping.

The history of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, which celebrates the one-hundred twentieth anniversary of its founding, is the path laid by our forebears who lived very full lives saying the Nembutsu here in Hawaii. On this occasion, it is my hope that as we reflect on the aspiration of our forebears, we contemplate the things we can do right now. We are embraced and illuminated by the wisdom and compassion of Amida Tathagata. With this in mind, let us show what we can do with the unique personality we each have, support and cooperate with each other, and together follow the path toward the realization of a fulfilling life and a world of peace and tranquility.

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