



Guide  
to  
Jodo  
Shinshu  
Teachings  
and  
Practices

Adapted from:  
**Renken Tokuhon**  
**Study Group Text**  
for  
**Followers of**  
**Shinran Shonin**

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## INTRODUCTION

This *Guide to Jodo Shinshu Teachings and Practices* is a translation of the *Renken Tokuhon Study Group Text for Followers of Shinran Shonin*. The *Guide* has been translated from the original version in Japanese and adapted for Jodo Shinshu Temples in North America.

The *Guide* has been developed as an introduction to Jodo Shinshu for the layperson. It is presented in 2 parts. *Part One* describes the life and teachings of the Buddha, and the history and evolution of Jodo Shinshu teachings. *Part Two* discusses Jodo Shinshu practices, including Jodo Shinshu religious days and services.

The Calgary Buddhist Temple gratefully acknowledges the Renken Tokuhon Study Group for providing the original text, and our mother Temple in Kyoto - the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha - for supporting our efforts. It is our hope that this *Guide* will provide a basic foundation for understanding Jodo Shinshu, and a path for embracing the life of a nembutsu follower.



# Table of Contents

## PART ONE: JODO SHINSHU TEACHINGS

1	THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA . . . . .	2
1.1	Birth of the Buddha . . . . .	2
1.2	Renunciation . . . . .	2
1.3	Practice and Enlightenment . . . . .	2
1.4	First Sermon . . . . .	2
1.5	Propagation of the Teachings and the Sangha . . . . .	3
1.6	The Buddha's Parinirvana . . . . .	3
1.7	The First Council . . . . .	4
2	SHAKYAMUNI'S TEACHINGS. . . . .	5
2.1	Dependent Origination (Pratitya-Samutpada) . . . . .	5
2.2	The Four Marks of Dharma. . . . .	5
2.3	The Middle Way . . . . .	6
2.4	Compassion . . . . .	6
2.5	Shila or Precepts . . . . .	6
3	MAHAYANA BUDDHIST SUTRAS . . . . .	7
3.1	Mahayana and Hinayana . . . . .	7
3.2	The Triple Sutras of the Pure Land School . . . . .	7
4	THE SEVEN PATRIARCHS. . . . .	9
4.1	Nagarjuna (Jap. Ryuju) (2nd-3rd century AD) . . . . .	9
4.2	Vasubandhu (Jap. Seshin) (4 <sup>th</sup> century AD). . . . .	10
4.3	T'an-luan (Jap. Donran) (476-542) . . . . .	11
4.4	Tao-ch'o (Jap. Doshaku) (562-645). . . . .	12
4.5	Shan-tao (Jap. Zendo) (613-681). . . . .	13
4.6	Genshin (Eshin Sozu) (942-1017) . . . . .	14
4.7	Honen Shonin (Genku) (1133-1212) . . . . .	15
5	THE LIFE OF SHINRAN SHONIN . . . . .	16
5.1	Introduction . . . . .	16
5.2	From Birth to Entering the Priesthood . . . . .	16
5.3	Life at Mt. Hiei. . . . .	16
5.4	The Period at Yoshimuzu Temple . . . . .	17
5.5	The Kanto Period and Formation of the Early Shinshu Sangha . . . . .	18
5.6	The Return to Kyoto and Shinran Shonin's Rebirth in the Pure Land. . . . .	19
6	THE TEACHING OF THE PRIMAL VOW OF OTHER POWER . . . . .	20
6.1	Introduction . . . . .	20
6.1	What is Other Power? . . . . .	20
6.2	What is the Primal Vow? . . . . .	20
6.4	The Origin of Other Power . . . . .	21
6.5	On Shinjin . . . . .	22
6.6	On Nembutsu . . . . .	22
6.7	Living in the Other Power of the Primal Vow. . . . .	22
7	THE TEACHING IS FOR THE EVIL PERSON . . . . .	24

7.1	The Evil Person*	.24
7.2	Who Is An Evil Person? . . . . .	.24
7.3	Self As It Is . . . . .	.25
7.4	Within the Light . . . . .	.25
8	REBIRTH IN THE PURE LAND . . . . .	.27
8.1	The Teachings on Birth in the Pure Land . . . . .	.27
8.2	What is the Pure Land? . . . . .	.27
8.3	What Does Rebirth Mean? . . . . .	.28

## PART TWO: JODO SHINSHU PRACTICES

9	JUZU, GASSHO AND SHOKO . . . . .	.32
9.1	Juzu (contemplation beads) . . . . .	.32
9.1.1	Whenever and Wherever . . . . .	.32
9.1.2	Usage . . . . .	.32
9.2	Gassho (placing palms together) and Bowing . . . . .	.32
9.2.1	3,000 years of Gassho . . . . .	.32
9.2.2	The practice of gassho . . . . .	.33
9.3	Guko (offering incense) . . . . .	.33
9.3.1	Shoko . . . . .	.33
9.3.2	Shoko stand . . . . .	.33
9.3.3	The practice of Shoko . . . . .	.33
9.4	Clothing . . . . .	.33
9.5	Montoshikisho (Sash) . . . . .	.34
10	THE LIFE OF A NEMBUTSU FOLLOWER . . . . .	.35
10.1	5 & 8 Precepts . . . . .	.35
10.2	Early Period of Jodo Shinshu Practice . . . . .	.35
10.3	Articles of Jodo Shinshu Faith . . . . .	.35
10.4	Sacred Books of Jodo Shinshu . . . . .	.37
10.5	Seiten (Service Book) . . . . .	.37
10.6	Conduct for Daily Service . . . . .	.39
11	BUTSUDAN (Buddhist Shrine) . . . . .	.41
11.1	Forms of the Butsudan . . . . .	.41
11.1.1	Differences Found in Various Sects . . . . .	.41
11.1.2	Gold Lacquered Butsudan and Natural Wood Butsudan . . . . .	.41
11.1.3	Regional Colours and New Butsudan . . . . .	.41
11.2	Decorating the Butsudan . . . . .	.41
12	SERVICES . . . . .	.49
12.1	Funeral . . . . .	.49
12.2	Jodo Shinshu Religious Days and Services . . . . .	.53
12.2.1	Shusoye (New Year's Day) . . . . .	.54
12.2.2	Hoonko (Shinran Shonin's Memorial) . . . . .	.54
12.2.3	Nehanye (Nirvana Day) . . . . .	.54
12.2.4	Higanye (Spring and Autumn Equinox) . . . . .	.55
12.2.5	Gotanye (Birth of Shinran Shonin) . . . . .	.55

12.2.6	Hanamatsuri (Buddha's Birthday) . . . . .	.55
12.2.7	Obon (Memorial Service) . . . . .	.55
12.2.8	Jodaye (Bodhi Day) . . . . .	.55
12.2.9	Joyaye (New Year's Eve Service) . . . . .	.55
13	IMPORTANT BUDDHIST OBSERVANCES FOR INDIVIDUAL LIFE . . . . .	.56
13.1	Tri Ratna Service (Infant Presentation Service) . . . . .	.56
13.2	Kikyoshiki (Confirmation) . . . . .	.56
13.3	Weddings. . . . .	.56
13.4	Silver and Gold Wedding Anniversaries. . . . .	.56
13.5	Purchase of Butsudan. . . . .	.56
14	APPENDIX - SHRINE ADORNMENTS . . . . .	.57
15	GLOSSARY . . . . .	.62



Part One  
Jodo Shinshu Teachings

# **1 THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA**

## **1.1 Birth of the Buddha**

About 2500 years ago, near the snow-capped Himalayan Mountains in northern India, there was a city named Kapilavastu. The clan called Sakya lived in this region. The king of the Sakya clan was King Suddhodana, and the queen was named Queen Maya. Queen Maya gave birth to a son at a grove called Lumbini under the ashoka tree. This child was Prince Siddhartha who later became Shakyamuni Buddha. In Japan, April 8 is celebrated as his birthday, and it is called Flower Festival Day or Hanamatsuri. After giving birth, Queen Maya's health declined and seven days after giving birth, she passed away.

## **1.2 Renunciation**

King Suddhodana and his subjects raised Prince Siddhartha with care and love. At the age of 19, Siddhartha married Yasodhara. Although his life seemed peaceful and happy on the surface, he was constantly questioning his own life as well as the world in general. At the age of 29, his son Rahula was born. Knowing that he now had an heir to the throne, Siddhartha decided to renounce his position, and he left the palace in search of enlightenment.

## **1.3 Practice and Enlightenment**

Siddhartha traveled along the Ganges River towards the southeast of India to a kingdom called Magada. Before reaching Magada, he had joined two or three different religious groups. However, these groups were not able to fulfill his search. Thus, he continued the path to enlightenment on his own.

He selected a place of practice on the south side of a village called Uruvilva. There, with five of his friends, he did ascetic practices for six years. Finding ascetic practices to be meaningless however, he accepted an offering of rice milk from a young woman named Sujata in order to strengthen his body and will. Seeing this, his friends thought that he had failed in the practice of enlightenment and abandoned him.

Left by himself, Siddhartha sat under a large asvattha tree and entered into the last forms of practice. At dawn, he attained enlightenment and became a Buddha. He was 35 years old. Today in Japan, this day is celebrated on December 8 as Bodhi Day. The village of Urevela later became known as Bodh Gaya, while the asvattha tree is now known as the bodhi tree.

## **1.4 First Sermon**

After his enlightenment, Shakyamuni stayed in Bodh Gaya for a period of time. He then decided to move on to teach other people about his experiences. He traveled several hundred kilometers to the northwest city of Varanasi where Brahmanism was flourishing. On the outskirts of this city was a

beautiful forest called Deer Park in a section of India now known as Sarnath. Here he found the five mendicants (*wandering monks*) who had practiced asceticism with him. He decided to deliver his first sermon there, calling it the *First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma*. Having heard the teachings, the five mendicants became the first disciples of Shakyamuni. Then, for the next 45 years, the Buddha traveled relentlessly on the path of propagating the teachings.

## 1.5 Propagation of the Teachings and the Sangha

It is said that after he attained enlightenment, the Buddha delivered dharma talks to hundreds of thousands of people. After seeing the Buddha, many people approached him to become his disciples. Many of these disciples abandoned all their belongings in order to become bhikshus and bhikshunis (*monks and nuns*). However, the teachings also became the centre of spiritual life for many lay people, called *upasaka* (men) and *upasiki* (women). Instead of following the strict rules of the mendicants, lay people followed the five Buddhist precepts: *no killing; no lying; no stealing; no sexual misconduct; and no intoxicating substances*.

These lay followers supported the sangha (*religious community*) with reverence and respect, providing it with food, shelter and clothing. In this way, the bhikshus and bhikshunis provided the lay people with the dharma and the lay people provided the bhikshus and bhikshunis with material goods. Thus, like the moving wheel of a cart, they helped each other to bring about the flourishing of the Buddha Dharma.

Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Purna and Ananda were some of the Buddha's most famous disciples. Shakyamuni's son Rahula can also be counted among these great disciples. Among the lay followers that were well known were King Bimbisara of Magada and his wife Queen Vaidehi, King Hashikone of Kosala, King Udayana, a wealthy man named Sudatta, and a prostitute named Amrapali. The famous bamboo grove in Rajagiri, where Buddha gave many teachings, was donated to the sangha by King Bimbisara. Similarly, the great merchant Sudatta donated the splendid grove of Jetavana Vihara.

## 1.6 The Buddha's Parinirvana

After many long years of teaching the dharma throughout the various parts of India, Shakyamuni became aware of his declining health. By this time, his reliable disciples Shariputra and Maudgalyayana had already left this earth. With his cousin Ananda, Shakyamuni left Rajagiri and began to travel back to his birthplace of Kapilavastu. Before he could finish his journey however, he became ill and in a sala grove at Kushinagar, he ended his life of enlightenment. He was 80 years old. The date that Buddha entered into parinirvana is usually called Nirvana Day and it is celebrated on February 15.

## 1.7 The First Council

Upon hearing of the Buddha's passing, his followers cremated him with great sadness, and his ashes were divided into eight parts. Stupas (*shrines*) were built to hold these ashes. Even the containers used to hold the ashes became a symbol of respect and stupas were built to hold them as well.

Mahakasyapa and Ananda, along with five hundred bhikshus, gathered near the Saptaparnaguha grove at Rajagiri to confirm the Buddha's life and teachings. They wanted to preserve his teachings and ensure that they were properly transmitted. This first gathering was called the First Council and at this gathering, the sutras (*teachings*) were transmitted orally. Buddha's teachings were not put into writing until 300 – 400 years after Shakyamuni passed away.

## 2 SHAKYAMUNI'S TEACHINGS

### 2.1 Dependent Origination (Pratitya-Samutpada)

*What did Shakyamuni attain under the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya? What were the teachings that he delivered between the time he gave his first dharma talk at the Deer Park near Sarnath and the time of his death, after 45 years of enlightened life?*

The essence of the Buddha Dharma is dependent origination, also called *pratitya-samutpada*. Dependent origination means that things arise out of causal relationships in which things arise and things are destroyed. Our entire world exists through causal relationships, whether we are coming or going, laughing or crying. Our life and death are also within this sphere of causal relationships.

### 2.2 The Four Marks of Dharma

The theory of causal relationships can be explained further through the four marks of the dharma.

The first mark is **impermanence**. Through causal relationships, things in this world continually go through the cycle of creation and destruction, inwardly as well as outwardly. Our world is constantly in transition. For example, young people will eventually grow up; those people who are now flourishing will inevitably decline. Such transition is called impermanence. In Buddhist philosophy, all things are impermanent.

The second mark is **non-ego or non-self**. Due to causal relationships, everything is constantly in a state of transformation or change. Nothing that exists has a permanent existence. Thus, there is no permanent, unchangeable self nor do our belongings have any permanent existence.

The third mark of the dharma is called **suffering**. Since the world is constantly changing, the self and the surrounding world all have temporary existence and thus, they have limitations. However, we become attached to this impermanent self and world. When we realize that everything has limitations, we become even more attached. The desire to pursue permanency continues and with it comes uncertainty and dissatisfaction. So we say that life is suffering and all things suffer. Generally speaking, suffering is divided into major suffering like sickness and old age, and minor suffering like meeting someone we don't like or not getting what we want.

The fourth mark is **peace and tranquility**. As already stated, the world is characterized by impermanence, non-self and suffering but human beings struggle to find eternity. One craves permanent existence and if life does not go the way one wishes, then anger, fear, resentment, anxiety and suffering occur. These emotions that defile or confuse us are called *kleshas* (evil passions). The purpose of the Buddha Dharma is to do away with these kleshas and enter into a peaceful, tranquil state – to become enlightened. This state is called nirvana.

These four characteristics are called the four great marks of the Buddha Dharma. The inclusion of these four marks identifies the teachings as the true Buddha Dharma.

## 2.3 The Middle Way

At the first teaching by Shakyamuni Buddha at Sarnath, the Buddha taught the Middle Way. The Middle Way is the path of moderation and non-extremism. We have a tendency to be carried away by extreme emotions such as love and hate, and to see things as good or bad. As a result, we tend to deviate from seeing clearly and living righteously in our daily lives. To avoid giving in to the extremes of pleasure or asceticism and to walk the path of righteousness is called the Middle Way. The Middle Way is described as the eightfold Noble Path:

- right view
- right understanding
- right speech
- right action
- right livelihood
- right effort
- right mindfulness
- right concentration.

The purpose of the Middle Way is to recognize that we have attachments and to sever those attachments. Therefore, the Middle Way leads to liberation and nirvana.

## 2.4 Compassion

Buddhism does not limit itself only to the problems of the world of impermanence and attachment. During his six years of ascetic practices, Shakyamuni cultivated the heart of compassion. Buddhist activities must include the tenderness and love which define compassion. There is another word – *awaremi* – which means mercy or deep sorrow. Often these two ideas of love and deep sorrow are joined together when we talk about Buddhist compassion. The ultimate aim of Buddha's teachings is to bring enlightenment to oneself, and at the same time, to lead others to enlightenment. The act of leading others to enlightenment is called compassion. Without this quality, it cannot be called a Buddhist teaching.

## 2.5 Shila or Precepts

*How do people who follow Buddha's teachings live on a day-to-day basis?* The standard for daily living is called *shila* or the precepts. It is important for lay followers to follow the five precepts of:

- no killing
- no stealing
- no lying
- no sexual misconduct
- no intoxicating substances.

In the case of Buddhist monks and nuns, based on these five precepts, monks will have approximately 200 other precepts and nuns have approximately 300 additional precepts. These precepts are strictly adhered to by monks and nuns in Buddhist countries in southern Asia.

### 3 MAHAYANA BUDDHIST SUTRAS

#### 3.1 Mahayana and Hinayana

After Shakyamuni Buddha and all of his disciples had passed away, the Buddhist sangha began to develop in different directions. Of these developments, the strongest movement was the preservation of the Buddhist precepts. Believing that they could attain emancipation through the precepts, some bhikshus concentrated on preserving the actual words spoken by the Buddha. As a result, the Buddha Dharma became more formal and the essence of the teachings, which was their strength, gradually began to disappear.

At the same time however, there were other bhikshus who believed that the true heart of the Buddha lay in transcending the precepts. Thus, even a lay person could attain awakening by encountering the great wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. This alternate movement slowly started to gain strength 400-500 years after Shakyamuni entered into parinirvana.

The sangha members of this alternate movement emphasized the importance of such sutras as the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, *Avatamsaka sutra*, *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* and *Vimalakirti Sutra*. They began to call themselves Mahayana (*greater vehicle*) Buddhists and referred to the major existing sangha as Hinayana (*smaller vehicle*) Buddhists.

As a result, struggles took place in India between Mahayana and Hinayana schools. Today, Mahayana Buddhism is dominant in central Asia, China, Korea and Japan while Hinayana (or Theravada) Buddhism flourishes in countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and southern Asia. To this day, people in these countries as well as their governments depend on the teachings as their guide to spiritual living.

#### 3.2 The Triple Sutras of the Pure Land School

Among the many sutras and shastras (*commentaries*), the sutras that are most related to Jodo Shinshu are:

- a. *Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra* (2 vols)
- b. *Meditation Sutra (Amitayur Dhyana Sutra)* (1 vol)
- c. *Smaller Sukhavativyuha Sutra* (1 vol).

These sutras are called the triple sutras of the Pure Land School.

The *Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra* is a record of the teachings delivered by Shakyamuni Buddha at Vulture Peak at Rajagiri. It tells the story of a king named Dharmakara who aspires to become perfectly enlightened after hearing Buddha's teachings. He makes 48 vows for the benefit of all beings and further aspires to establish a Buddha land (Pure Land) where all beings can be reborn. After many years of practice, Dharmakara attained Buddhahood and was named Amida Buddha (*Buddha of Infinite Light and Life*).

When we observe our world, we become aware that some people have superior qualities and others do

not. Similarly, we notice that some people behave ethically while others do not. This sutra however, tells us that all of these people will be reborn into Amida Buddha's realm by single mindedly surrendering to Tathagata's (*Buddha's*) wisdom and compassion.

The *Meditation Sutra* was directed to Queen Vaidehi who was put into prison by her own son Ajatasatru. Shakyamuni Buddha teaches her 13 stages of meditation and 9 types of beings, comprised of upper, middle and lower beings. The ultimate teaching of this sutra is that we will enter the Pure Land of Amida Buddha through the practice of the nembutsu (*recitation of Amida's name*).

The *Smaller Sukhavativyuha Sutra* was delivered by the Buddha to his disciple Shariputra at Jetavana Vihara in Sravasti. The Buddha describes the majestic splendor of the Pure Land and confirms that one who recites the nembutsu is assured of entrance into that realm. The Buddha verifies this promise by reciting the testimony of the Buddhas of the six directions who confirm the truth of Amida's teachings.

The founder of Jodo Shinshu, Shinran Shonin, revered these three sutras. He relied upon these sutras as the basis of his spiritual belief and walked the path of the nembutsu. In addition, Shinran Shonin was indebted for the formation of his thought to the 7 patriarchs of India, China and Japan, including Nagarjuna (the father of Mahayana Buddhism), who extolled Amida's vow to save all beings. Thus, Shinran Shonin states in the *Shoshinge (Hymn of True Faith)*:

*The Masters of India in the West who explain the teaching entreat us,  
and the eminent monks of China and Japan,  
clarified the great sage's (Shakyamuni's) true intent in appearing in this world,  
and revealed that Amida's Primal Vow accords with the nature of beings.*

In the next chapter, we will briefly explain who these 7 patriarchs are and the characteristics of their teachings.

## 4 THE SEVEN PATRIARCHS

### 4.1 Nagarjuna (Jap. Ryuju) (2nd-3rd century AD)

The next great figure in Buddhist history that appeared after Shakyamuni Buddha was the Bodhisattva Nagarjuna. He lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD in southern India. Nagarjuna is known for advocating the teaching of sunyata or emptiness which is taught in the *Prajnaparamitra Sutra* (the philosophy of the Middle Way).

Among Nagarjuna's many writings is the work called *Dasabhumika-vibhasa sastra*. In the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter, called *The Chapter on Easy Practice*, he points out two ways of attaining the state of *avinivartaniya* (the state of non-retrogression). He refers to one path as the path of difficult practice and the other path – reliance on the vows of Amida Buddha – as the path of easy practice. Nagarjuna compares the path of difficult practice to traveling to enlightenment on a dirt road whereas the path of easy practice is like sailing on water in a large boat. He points out that the teaching of the Nembutsu is the certain, easy path to Buddhahood.

From *Shoshinge* ...

*Sakya, the Tathagata, on Mount Lanka,  
Predicted to the multitudes that in Southern India  
Nagarjuna, the Mahasattva, would appear in this world  
And completely rend the views of being and non-being;*

*He would express the highest Dharma of Mahayana;  
Attaining the Stage of Joy, he would be reborn in the Land of Peace and Bliss.  
He disclosed that the difficult practices are toilsome, like walking on land,  
And urged us to believe that the easy practice is pleasant, like sailing on water.*

*When the continuant Shinjin in Amida Buddha's Original Vow is awakened,  
In that very instant do we spontaneously enter the Certainly Assured State.  
Uttering only the Tathagata's Name always,  
We should express our gratitude for the Great Compassionate Vow.*

(Thus Nagarjuna said).

## 4.2 Vasubandhu (Jap. Seshin) (4<sup>th</sup> century AD)

Approximately 200 years after Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu was born in northwestern India. He was known as a renowned scholar in a Hinayana sect called Saravastivada but was later persuaded to convert to Mahayana Buddhism by his older brother Asanga. Having adopted Nagarjuna's teachings on sunyata, Vasubandhu formulated the basis for Mahayana Buddhism. Among his major writings, his own spiritual sentiments can be found in the *Sukhavativyuha Bipasha Verses* (sometimes called *Jodoron* or *Ojoron – Treatise on the Pure Land*). In this writing, Vasubandhu first describes the main purpose of the *Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra*, stating that one should rely on Tathagata Amitabha single heartedly and wish to be born into the Pure Land of Bliss. He teaches five ways to attain birth in the Pure Land, including:

- a. worshipping Amitabha
- b. praising Amitabha
- c. wishing to be reborn in the Pure Land
- d. contemplating the Pure Land, Amitabha, and various Bodhisattvas
- e. transmitting merit to other beings.

In this way, one who has attained Buddhahood through the aspiration to be born in the Pure Land must return to the world of kleshas (evil passions) and help others to become enlightened, giving relief to the most corrupt beings.

From *Shoshinge* ...

*Bodhisattva Vasubandhu, composing a discourse, professed  
That he himself took refuge in the Tathagata of Unimpeded Light;  
In accordance with the Sutras he revealed the Truth,  
And elucidated the Great Vow for the "Crossover Transcendence".*

*In order to save universally the living beings, he manifested the One Mind,  
Showing that it is an endowment by the Power of the Original Vow.  
Upon entering with trust the Great Treasure-Ocean of Merits,  
Unfailingly will one be numbered among the Great Assemblage.*

*When one reaches the World of Lotus store,  
Instantly will he be enlightened to Thusness, or the Dharmakaya.  
Roaming in the forests of evil passions, he will wield the transcendental powers;  
Entering the garden of Birth-and-Death, he will manifest himself responsively.*

(Thus Vasubandhu said)

### 4.3 T'an-luan (Jap. Donran) (476-542)

T'an-luan was born in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century in Shan-Hei province in northern China and taught the Madyamika doctrine of the 4 Discourses School. When he reached middle age, he became interested in writing a commentary on the Great Collection Sutra (60 vols). In order to achieve the task of understanding this sutra, he first sought methods to obtain health and longevity through Taoism. However, Bodhiruci, translator of discourses on the Pure Land, persuaded T'an-luan that seeking longevity was wrong and guided him to follow the path of rebirth in the Pure Land.

T'an-luan wrote a detailed commentary on Vasubandhu's Treatise on the Pure Land, titled "*Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land*." In it, he comments on the first line of the treatise: "*With singleness of heart, I rely upon the world honored one*", maintaining that singleness of heart arises from single, pure and continuous mind. T'an-luan further reveals the meaning of pure faith. He states that the *aspect of going to the Pure Land* and *aspect of our returning to this world* are both possible only through the workings of Tathagata Amitabha. They cannot be accomplished by self-power.

The great master T'an-luan wrote other important works before he passed away at the age of 67. The emperor of that period paid high respect and honour to this great and virtuous man.

From *Shoshinge* ...

*Donran is a Master of this sect. The King of Ryo,  
Always facing toward his place, venerated him as a Bodhisattva.  
When Bodhiruci, Master of the Tripitaka, handed him a Pure Land Scripture,  
He burned his Taoist text and took refuge in the Land of Bliss.*

*Commenting on the Bodhisattva Vasubandhu's discourse,  
He revealed that the cause and effect of Birth in the Land of Recompense are due to the Vows.  
Merit-Transferences for Going Forward and Returning originate in the Other-Power; The cause which  
rightly assures Birth is solely Shinjin\*.*

*When Shinjin is raised in a deluded and defiled ordinary man,  
He is made aware that Birth-and-Death is identical with Nirvana.  
After he unfailingly reaches the Land of Immeasurable Light,  
He will save universally all living beings.*

(Thus Donran said.)

\*Shinjin = True Mind

#### 4.4 Tao-ch'o (Jap. Doshaku) (562-645)

Approximately one hundred years later, Tao-ch'o was born in northern China. At the age of 14, he became a student of the Nirvana sect and studied the Nirvana Sutra. When he was 54 years old, he entered Genchuji Temple where he discovered T'an-luan's writing on a stone monument. Impressed by this writing, he became a nembutsu follower. It is said that he recited 70,000 nembutsu per day by counting azuki (red beans) or nenju (beads).

In his major work, there is a 2 volume text called *Anrakushu (Passages on Birth in the Pure Land)*. Tao-ch'o divides Buddhism into the Sacred Path and the Pure Land Path. The Sacred Path leads to attainment in this world by one's own power while the Pure Land Path leads to attainment in the Pure Land through receiving Amida Buddha's light. Believing that people were living in a period of decadence, Tao-ch'o taught that the only way to become a Buddha was through the Pure Land Path.

It is said that Master Tao-ch'o gave over 200 lectures on the Meditation Sutra. His life ended at the ripe old age of 84 while he was reciting the nembutsu.

From *Shoshinge* ...

*Doshaku ascertained that Bodhi is difficult to attain by the Path of Sages  
Clarifying that the Pure Land Path alone is possible for us.  
He disparaged the practicing of thousands of good deeds with self-power  
And encouraged the exclusive utterance of the Name consummated with perfect virtues.*

*He thoughtfully cautioned against the Three Aspects of Impure Faith and urged us to maintain the Three Aspects of Pure Shinjin.  
He compassionately led the men in the Ages of the Semblance Dharma, the Decadent Dharma, and the Extinct Dharma as well.  
If we, though sinning all through life, meet the Universal Vow,  
We shall reach the Land of Serene Sustenance and realize the Supreme Fruition.*

(Thus Doshaku said.)

#### 4.5 Shan-tao (Jap. Zendo) (613-681)

The great master Shan-tao, a direct disciple of Tao-ch'ò, lived during the height of the flourishing of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty. He propagated the nembutsu teachings in the capital of Ch'ang-an. Of Shan-tao's many writings, the most important treatise is *Kangyosho (Commentary on the Meditation Sutra)*. In it, the great master describes 13 methods of meditation (*jozen*) and 9 classifications of human beings (*sanzen*). Both *jozen* and *sanzen* are ways to be born into the Pure Land. But to recite the nembutsu daily is the most important path.

The master refers to the three minds in the Meditation Sutra: sincere mind, deep mind, and mind of merit-transference. Of these three minds, he stresses the importance of deep mind or deep wisdom. Master Shan-tao's explanation of the two aspects of deep mind is well known. The deep mind of ordinary beings brings awareness that ordinary beings are absolutely incapable of clearly understanding man's existence and the depth of man's corruption i.e. it brings forth awareness that for many ages, ordinary, foolish beings have wandered in the world of illusion. On the other hand, the deep mind of the dharma (Amitabha Tathagata's Original Vow or the Primal Vow of Amitabha Tathagata) will bring awareness that without fail, such ordinary beings will be awakened in the Pure Land by the compassion of Amitabha Tathagata.

In addition to the *Commentary on the Meditation Sutra*, Shan-tao is well known for many other important teachings. The Buddhist world was especially influenced by his parable of *Two Rivers and a White Path*. It describes a traveler walking a white narrow path that stretches between a river of raging water and a river of fire. From the eastern shore, Shakyamuni Buddha urges the traveler to go forward on the white path while Amida Buddha beckons to the traveler from the western bank.

From *Shoshinge* ...

*Zendo was the only one who clarified the Buddha's real intent.  
Pitying those who practice the meditative and non-meditative practices  
and those with deadly sins and evils.  
He revealed that the Light and Name are the cause and condition (for Birth),  
And led them into the Great Wisdom Ocean of the Original Vow;  
And then When the aspirant receives the Diamond Mind,  
In harmonizing with His Mind through the Single Thought of Joy,  
He shall obtain the Three Insights, as did Vaidehi,  
And realize Eternal Bliss of Dharmata.*

(Thus Zendo said).

#### 4.6 Genshin (Eshin Sozu) (942-1017)

Genshin was born about 1000 years ago during the Heian Period in the village of Taima in Nara prefecture. At the age of 9, he became a monk of the Tendai school at Mt. Hiei. At the Eshin-in Temple at Yokawa, he was influenced by the nembutsu teachings and at the age of 44, wrote a famous work called *Ojoyoshu* (*Collection on the Essentials for Attaining Birth in the Pure Land*). Through this writing, Genshin greatly influenced the people of that period to practice the nembutsu. Similarly, *Ojoyoshu* influenced many people in China when it was brought to that land.

Genshin stated that there are 2 kinds of nembutsu practitioners. There are those who devote their entire life to the practice of the nembutsu and those who practice the nembutsu along with other Buddhist practices. He also states that there are 2 kinds of Pure Lands: the land of recompense and the land of transformation. Those who practice the nembutsu exclusively will be born into the land of recompense while those who mix the nembutsu practice with other practices will be born into the land of transformation. He persuaded people to follow the path of practicing the nembutsu exclusively.

In addition to *Ojoyoshu*, Genshin produced over 70 volumes of writing. His great life ended at the age of 76.

From *Shoshinge* ...

*Genshin widely expounded on the Buddha's life-time Teachings  
But he took refuge exclusively in the Land of Serene Sustenance and recommended it to all.  
Discerning that the Shinjin of Exclusive Practice is deep and the Faith of Sundry Practices shallow,  
He distinctly showed the difference between the Recompensed Land and the Transformed Land.*

*Men with extremely heavy sins should only utter the Buddha's Name.  
I, too, am in his embrace,  
Though I cannot see His Light, my eye being obstructed by evil passions,  
The Great Mercy always shines upon me untiringly.*

(Thus Genshin said).

## 4.7 Honen Shonin (Genku) (1133-1212)

Honen Shonin was born in 1133 in Mimasaka province (now Okayama prefecture). After witnessing the murder of his father at age 9, he shaved his head and climbed Mt. Hiei to study Tendai doctrines. Later on, he also studied Hosso, Sanron and Kegon doctrines. At age 43, influenced by Genshin's *Ojoyoshu* and in particular, Shan-Tao's *Commentary on the Meditation Sutra*, Honen Shonin abandoned other paths and singlemindedly entered the path of the nembutsu.

Honen Shonin built a temple at Yoshimizu in Kyoto, Japan. He taught the way of the nembutsu in simple, common terms and accepted all people, regardless of class, age or sect. Because of the numerous people visiting Honen Shonin, the area in front of his temple soon became a city. Shinran Shonin, founder of Jodo Shinshu, was one of those people who gathered at the Yoshimizu sangha. Because of his flourishing sangha, Honen Shonin was threatened with persecution many times by jealous leaders of other sects. Eventually, the government of that period ordered the sangha to disband. Despite these harsh ordeals, his disciples continued to teach the nembutsu.

Honen Shonin's major writing is called *Senjaku Hongwan Nembutsu-Shu (Passages on the Selection of the Nembutsu in the Original Vow)*. It was as a result of this writing that Honen Shonin established the independent sect called Jodo Shu or Pure Land sect. As its main sutras and discourses, Honen Shonin selected the three sutras of the Pure Land and Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*. Of the 48 vows in the *Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra*, Honen Shonin stressed that the 18<sup>th</sup> vow was the most important. He called it the king of original vows or the Primal Vow:

*If, after my attaining Buddhahood, all beings in the ten quarters who with sincerity of heart entrusting themselves and wishing to be born in my country, repeating my name perhaps ten times, are not so born, may I not achieve the Highest Enlightenment. (18<sup>th</sup> Vow)*

Shinran Shonin who accepted the essence of Honen Shonin's teachings (receiving his robe and bowl) would develop his teachings further.

From *Shoshinge* ...

*Genku, Master of this sect, well-versed in Buddhism,  
Pitied ordinary men, whether good or evil.  
Spreading the Teaching of Shinshu in the Far-off Islands  
He propagated the Selected Original Vow in this evil world.*

*One's coming back to the house of cyclic Birth and Death  
Is decisively due to the doubt which binds him to it;  
One's entering promptly the Capital of Tranquility and the Unconditioned,  
Is necessarily caused by Shinjin which makes him enter there.*

(Thus Genku said).

## **5 THE LIFE OF SHINRAN SHONIN**

### **5.1 Introduction**

We have studied the development of Buddhism from Shakyamuni Buddha to Honen Shonin. Now, by examining the life of Shinran Shonin, we will try to deepen our understanding of Shinran Shonin's teachings. In Buddhism, the dharma invariably reveals itself in the way one lives one's personal life. In a similar way, the teachings of Jodo Shinshu are revealed in the way that Shinran Shonin lived his life.

### **5.2 From Birth to Entering the Priesthood**

Shinran Shonin, the founder of Jodo Shinshu, was born on May 21, 1173 as the son of Arinori, a descendant of the Fujiwara clan. This period of Japanese history was a time of upheaval during which the control of the ruling party was being transferred from the noble class to the warrior class. Along with this transition, there were internal struggles occurring within noble families as well as warrior families. Parents were fighting with sons, and brothers were quarrelling with brothers. It was a terrible time as the battles raged on, causing starvation and suffering among the people of that period. In addition, there were natural disasters occurring throughout the land, making this period one of the most chaotic and war-torn times in Japan.

Although Shinran Shonin belonged to the Hino family of the Fujiwara clan, it is believed that he lost both parents at an early age. He was parted from his father, Arinori, when he apparently went into hiding during the war of Heiji. It is said that his mother, Kikko-Nyo, died when he was 8 years old. As a result of the deaths of his parents, Shinran Shonin entered the priesthood at the age of 9, receiving tokudo (ordination) from Jichin Kasho who had served as the head priest on Mt. Hiei for many years.

Shinran Shonin was influenced to become a priest by a number of factors: the impermanency of life that he experienced by the deaths of his parents; the war during that period that resulted in relatives killing each other; the great famine and the fall of the noble class. In a letter that his wife Eshinni wrote to her daughter Kakushinni, she reveals that Shinran Shonin was motivated to enter the priesthood after seeing the poor and suffering in the world of samsara:

*Single-mindedly, Shonin pursued the way to transcend the world of samsara.*

### **5.3 Life at Mt. Hiei**

Soon after he received tokudo, Shinran Shonin ascended Mt. Hiei. Founded by Dengyo Daishi Saicho, Mt. Hiei was established as a place to train and develop people who would be leaders of a future world. It became the place where the essence of Buddhism was taught.

Young Shinran Shonin would have ascended Mt. Hiei with an enormous amount of hope of solving the problems of life and death. In those days, Mt. Hiei had three categories of priests: gakusho, doshu and doso. The gakusho, who were from the noble class, were students who studied and practiced Buddhism according to the rules set forth by Master Saicho. The doshu were servants who followed

their noblemen up onto the mountain. Thus, they did not have the same goals of learning and practicing the paths of Buddhism. The doso were priests who diligently practiced Buddhist teachings such as *jogyozanmai* (the continuous practice of *samadhi* – deep meditation).

At the time that Shinran Shonin entered Mt. Hiei, a group of doshu had brought with them the powerful struggles that were occurring in their society. They fought among themselves and ignored the Buddhist path. Their struggles then influenced the doso priests, many of whom no longer practiced the way of Buddhism seriously. Until recently, Buddhist scholars believed that Shonin belonged to the gakusho or noble class of priests. The discovery of Eshinni's letter to her daughter however, revealed that he belonged to the doso priests and practiced *jogyozanmai*.

*Jogyozanmai* is one of the four practices of the Tendai sect. According to the rules of Mt. Hiei, the practitioner must practice *samadhi* for ninety days without rest. It is a very strenuous practice of walking continuously around the statue of the Buddha while contemplating the Buddha and reciting the nembutsu. Through this practice, the doso strives to enter *samadhi* in order to attain the true state of Buddhahood.

Various legendary tales of Shinran Shonin's religious practices at Mt. Hiei describe the severity of his practice of *jogyozanmai*. In his search to find the path to transcend samsara, Shinran Shonin practiced even at the risk of sacrificing his own life. Finding himself unable to reach his goal however, he despaired and finally descended Mt. Hiei.

Zonkaku Shonin describes the state of Shinran Shonin's mental anguish during this period:

*Even though he tried to still his mind (the water), waves of consciousness constantly moved him, and though he tried to still his mind in concentration (the moon), it was constantly covered over by the cloud of illusion.*

In desperation, Shinran Shonin tried to seek instruction from Prince Shotoku (574-621) whom he respected and admired greatly. Prince Shotoku – the second son of Emperor Yomei – established Buddhism in Japan by creating the Seventeen-Article Constitution based on the Buddha-dharma. Shinran Shonin entered the Rokkakudo Temple which was founded by Prince Shotoku in Kyoto. In this temple, where Kannon (the Goddess of Mercy) is enshrined, Shinran Shonin confined himself for 100 days of meditation. On the 95<sup>th</sup> day, a vision of Prince Shotoku appeared before him, instructing Shinran Shonin to visit Honen Shonin.

While he was at Mt. Hiei, Shinran Shonin must have heard of Honen Shonin who was advocating the recitation of the nembutsu at his temple in Yoshimizu. However, Shinran Shonin did not abandon his practice and studies at Mt. Hiei until he was persuaded to leave by the vision of Prince Shotoku. Then, Shinran Shonin descended Mt. Hiei, determined to enter the gate of Yoshimuzu and become Honen Shonin's disciple.

#### **5.4 The Period at Yoshimuzu Temple**

The momentous first meeting between Shinran Shonin and Honen Shonin is noted by Shinran Shonin's great grandson Kakunyo in the writing *Godensho*:

*At once, Shinran Shonin received the essence of embracing the nature of Other Power and directly entered into accepting the true mind of Amida Buddha.*

The phrase “at once” is used to emphasize Shinran Shonin’s deep commitment to the path of Other Power. In reality however, the decision to abandon the holy path of self-power and enter the Jodo school of other power was not simple. Although Shinran Shonin casually mentions that he abandoned “*sundry practices to enter into the Primal Vow*”, his writings suggest that he regretted his twenty years of repeated struggles and long detoured journey in search of his goal. According to the letters of his wife Eshinni, “*rain or shine, irregardless of other important matters*”, Shinran Shonin traveled to see Honen Shonin for one hundred days. Finally, he entered the Jodo school of Other Power to discover the transcendental path from samsara:

*I simply accept the words of my dear teacher: “Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida”, and entrust myself in the Primal Vow. Besides this, there is nothing else. (From the Tannisho)*

Shinran Shonin’s six years at Yoshimuzu Temple were not peaceful. The oppression of the holy practice of nembutsu by politicians and others shook the temple like a tempest, reaching its climax in 1207 in the persecution of the dharma. Honen Shonin was exiled to the province of Tosa and Shinran Shonin to the province of Echigo, both without a trial. At the time, Honen Shonin was 75 and Shinran Shonin only 35. Even though deep karmic events had brought the two men together, they were never to be united again.

Five years later, at the age of 40, the court released Shinran Shonin from the severe northern country to which he had been exiled. Yet, his severe life in exile became the first step in Shinran Shonin’s unique way of propagating the way of the nembutsu. As an exiled person, his daily life became a constant struggle for existence. As time went on, people started to visit the exiled Shinran Shonin. Among them was the daughter of Miyoshi Tamenori, a powerful family clan of that region. When Shinran Shonin was 37 years old, he married the daughter whose name was Eshinni.

Shinran Shonin and Eshinni had six children. The daily life of the family centred on the nembutsu and the teachings of Amida Buddha. After Shinran Shonin’s death, the letters that Eshinni sent to their youngest daughter, Kakushinni, confirmed their way of life. While their life on the outside was not that different from others, Shinran Shonin indicated how joyful was the life of the nembutsu.

## **5.5 The Kanto Period and Formation of the Early Shinshu Sangha**

After leaving the province of Echigo, Shinran Shonin went on a long journey until at age 43, he settled in the grass shed monastery at Inada in the Kanto area. The twenty years in Kanto were the most vigorous of his life. Because of Shinran Shonin’s intense aspirations to propagate the Jodo Shinshu teachings during that period, the light of nembutsu flourished. It is said that over 100,000 people followed the way of the nembutsu. Furthermore, these people created the Jodo Shinshu sangha, a new social order that had never been experienced before in the history of Japan.

The sangha had three characteristics:

1. All members of the sangha were recognized as equal, regardless of position.
2. The sangha espoused complete freedom from beliefs in magic or superstitions.
3. Each member was a devout listener of the teachings on Amida Buddha and propagated them.

It is important to note that the commitment by these people to form such a strong society for the enjoyment of the nembutsu has never occurred again, even to this day.

## **5.6 The Return to Kyoto and Shinran Shonin's Rebirth in the Pure Land**

Shinran Shonin devoted his daily life to the propagation of the nembutsu for twenty long years until he reached the age of 63. These were many years spent with people who lived the joy of the nembutsu, hearing and sharing the teachings. But Shinran Shonin had another very important task: to complete his major work, *Kyogyoshinsho*. To accomplish this, it was necessary for him to return to Kyoto.

For Shinran Shonin, returning to Kyoto to spend his last years must have seemed a peaceful solution but he also feared his retirement greatly. As the central figure of the nembutsu movement, he felt very responsible to his followers. Nevertheless, for the sake of people in Kyoto as well as people of the future, Shinran Shonin left the Kanto area. With a heavy heart, he returned to the capital with some of his family.

Shinran Shonin left behind many writings. Most of these writings were produced after he returned to Kyoto. Even today, it is amazing to learn that he continued to write until he was 88. On January 16, 1262 at noon, his extraordinary life ended. He was then 90 years old.

Deeply moved by the scene at his deathbed, Kakunyo – the great grandson of Shinran Shonin and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gomonshu of the Hongwanji – wrote:

*Towards the latter part of mid-winter in the second year of Kocho (1262), Shinran Shonin showed symptoms of a slight indisposition. From this time on, he never mentioned earthly things but dwelled only on deep gratitude to the Buddha. His only words were the constant recitation of the nembutsu. On the same day, at noon, he laid himself on his right side with his head towards the north and his face towards the west. When his recitation of nembutsu was heard no more, he passed away. He was just completing his 90<sup>th</sup> year.*

## **6 THE TEACHING OF THE PRIMAL VOW OF OTHER POWER**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Based on an understanding of Buddhism in general, we can now proceed to understand the specific teachings of Jodo Shinshu. In order to do this, we have first studied the life of Shinran Shonin. Showing undaunted strength throughout his long, harsh life of 90 years, Shinran Shonin was able to survive through the radiant light of Amida Buddha's compassion. The teachings of Jodo Shinshu were the basis of his wonderful life. Of these teachings, there are three essential teachings which must always be considered:

- the teaching of the Primal Vow of Other Power
- the teaching directed to evil persons
- the teaching on birth in the Pure Land.

Unfortunately, these essential teachings have not always been transmitted correctly. In this chapter, we will discuss the teachings of the Primal Vow of Other Power in order to deepen our understanding of the meaning of the nembutsu and shinjin.

### **6.1 What is Other Power?**

In Japan, we often hear on television and read in the newspaper that other power – relying on the power of others or depending on others – is not good. Instead, we hear that we should rely on ourselves or self-power. This is a great mistake in understanding the meaning of the Primal Vow of Other Power in Jodo Shinshu. Shinran Shonin clearly states that Other Power is the power of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. Other Power is not the power of another human being or other human beings. Rather, Shinran Shonin teaches that Other Power is only the Buddha's power of the Primal Vow. It is the workings of Amida Buddha to help us attain Buddhahood so that we will be born in the Pure Land.

Regardless of the nature of a person, Amida Buddha cannot remain silent and abandon that person. Amida continually works to awaken all beings that are in the world of illusion (samsara). His work appears in the form of the Primal Vow and as the nembutsu. Thus, Other Power means the Primal Vow and the nembutsu itself. This is the reason it is called the Primal Vow of Other Power. In Shinran Shonin's writing, there is no reference to the Primal Vow of self-power so we cannot equate self-power with the Primal Vow.

### **6.2 What is the Primal Vow?**

The Primal Vow is the basic universal will. When Bodhisattvas of the Mahayana tradition walk the path to Buddhahood, their will is not only to seek awakening for themselves but for all beings to attain Buddhahood. Thus, the will must benefit others in addition to the self. This basic will is called the universal vow.

All Bodhisattvas possess their own special vows, called the separate vows of the Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva Dharmakara (who became Amida Buddha) has his own separate vows which are sometimes referred to as the 48 vows. Of these vows, the 18<sup>th</sup> vow is called the Special Vow because it emancipates all living beings unconditionally. Thus, it is called the great Will or the Will that extends eternally:

*If, after my attaining Buddhahood, all beings in the ten quarters who with sincerity of heart entrusting themselves and wishing to be born in my country, repeating my name perhaps ten times, are not so born, may I not achieve the Highest Enlightenment.*

(18<sup>th</sup> Vow)

The 18<sup>th</sup> vow is sometimes also called the Selected Vow. Shinran Shonin states that this vow is the essence of Jodo Shinshu. In other words, Jodo Shinshu is the dharma of true reality which awakens all beings to Buddhahood.

Consider that a child lives within the loving wishes of his/her parents. These parental wishes are not simply wishes but have the power to be actualized in the child's life. Thus, the parents' wishes work entirely for the child's benefit. In the same way, Amida's Primal Vow is placed on each of us and at the same time, becomes a power that supports our existence. This power is called the Other Power or the power of the Primal Vow, and its action is called *eko* (transferring one's merit) i.e. directing the benefits to all beings to help them to achieve awakening.

The parents' wishes express themselves in the form of a beautiful love for their child only, and not for other children but this love may turn into ugly egoism. In contrast, Buddha's Great Vow of compassion extends equally to all. It is truly the vow that "*does not discriminate whether one is young or old, good or evil*" (*Tannisho*). It is for this reason that the vow is said to extend to all beings throughout the ten quarters (e.g. the world).

## 6.4 The Origin of Other Power

The purpose of Other Power is to bring about our own birth in the Pure Land. It is the power of the Buddha to help us attain Buddhahood. *But where does this Buddha power originate?* The answer lies in the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha. The elements of enlightenment have within them the ability to bring others to enlightenment. It is like light having in its nature the ability to destroy darkness. It is only when light reaches darkness that darkness disappears. Similarly, regardless of how long the darkness of our illusion has existed, the illusion is destroyed instantly when the light of enlightenment reaches us.

We do not possess any power at all to attain enlightenment by ourselves. Through his wisdom, the eyes of Amida Buddha perceived this and could not abandon us. Directing the mind of great compassion, Amida Buddha could not help but work on our behalf. This working is called Other Power and when it reveals itself concretely, it takes the form of the Primal Vow. Thus, Jodo Shinshu bases itself on the Primal Vow of Other Power.

## 6.5 On Shinjin

All religions require shinjin as a core belief, revealed through such concepts as “have faith”, “do not doubt” etc. However, the Jodo Shinshu teaching of shinjin is completely different from that of other religions.

Jodo Shinshu teaches that shinjin is the true cause of attaining Buddhahood and birth in the Pure Land. This does not mean however that acquiring shinjin is the same as being saved. The term “*I believe*” is considered to be the illusory mind of the ordinary person. Shinjin, on the other hand, is known as true mind because it is the Buddha mind. When this Buddha mind reaches our mind and heart, it is called shinjin. It is the true mind of the Other Power being transferred to an ordinary person. Thus, it is entirely the working of the power of the Primal Vow.

*But how can this working reach our mind?* The answer lies in simply “listening”. Without listening, shinjin will be permanently unavailable to us. Furthermore, to listen does not mean to just listen but to listen as we reflect on our daily life and appreciate its importance. This is the reason that the teachings state: *listen thoughtfully*. When we listen thoughtfully, the Buddha mind will appear in our mind as shinjin. This deeper meaning of listening is described in phrases like *listening is true mind* and *to hear is to reveal the true mind of shinjin*. To listen in order to increase our knowledge or to enrich our mind will not bring about true understanding that leads to birth in the Pure Land. Furthermore, this type of listening cannot be the source of energy that gives us the strength to live in this harsh world.

## 6.6 On Nembutsu

As discussed previously, the Primal Vow of Other Power takes final concrete form in the nembutsu. The nembutsu exists solely for the sake of our liberation; it is not static but must constantly be active and moving dynamically to awaken us. This intense movement flows into us and reveals itself as shinjin. At the same time, it reveals itself through the expression of the nembutsu. As it enters our mind and our heart, we receive this constant active movement as an expression of Amida Buddha. Like the sweet fragrance from a single cherry blossom that reveals the coming of spring or the cricket in the field that reveals the approach of autumn, the nembutsu reveals itself in us as an inner voice, awakening Amida’s great compassion.

We often understand the reciting of the nembutsu to be the condition for awakening but this interpretation is completely incorrect. The fact that the nembutsu reveals itself in the recitation is proof that Amida Buddha’s actions to help us attain Buddhahood have reached us. Thus, we appreciate the significance of even a single person becoming a person of the nembutsu. We must recognize the power of the nembutsu as we recite it. Since people are always seeking happiness in this illusory world, the nembutsu alone can lead us to happiness. The reason is that the nembutsu alone provides us with the energy to live fully until we return to the Pure Land.

## 6.7 Living in the Other Power of the Primal Vow

The general understanding of living within the Other Power of the Primal Vow is that we should rely on other people or laws that are imposed upon us, resulting in dull, passive lives. This is an incorrect

understanding of the Other Power of the Primal Vow in Jodo Shinshu. The true meaning of living in the Other Power of the Primal Vow can be clearly seen in Shinran Shonin's 90 years of fulfilled life. As he stated through his powerful words in the Tannisho:

*In the person who lives in nembutsu opens up the great path of unobstruction.*

Despite our present extravagant lives, we experience a great emptiness. This empty feeling and its hunger can never be fulfilled unless we choose a life that leads us on the path of the Other Power of the Primal Vow. Once a person enters into the life of the nembutsu, it becomes a wonderful life without a single element of fear. We will be released from any fear due to uncertainty or fear of being punished by gods or demons. We must receive this path as the single path to freedom. Thus, one of the pivotal points of Jodo Shinshu is to truly live within the teachings of the Other Power of the Primal Vow.

## 7 THE TEACHING IS FOR THE EVIL PERSON

### 7.1 The Evil Person\*

The Japanese term *akunin shoki* is a very difficult term to decipher, even for the average Japanese. We will discuss the meaning of the second essential teaching of Jodo Shinshu by analyzing this term. *Shoki* means persons who are aimed at directly. As we have discussed in previous sections, Amida Buddha continually and dynamically aims to awaken all beings. Of these beings, the activity of Amida Buddha is directly aimed at certain persons. This is the meaning of *shoki*. *But who are the persons at which Buddha aims his activities?* They are aimed at *akunin* (evil persons), therefore the term *akunin shoki*.

We generally define an evil person as a person who conducts bad acts or is cited in the newspaper for wrongdoing. In addition to these persons, those people who have been ostracized as terrible people, even though they may not have committed any crimes, are also considered to be evil persons. In the case of *akunin*, as the term is used by Shinran Shonin however, this definition of evil person does not apply. *Akunin* cannot be viewed only within a moral context. *Then, what does he mean when he says that the evil person is the target of Amida Buddha?* Unless we understand the correct meaning of evil person, we cannot truly live the the Jodo Shinshu way of life.

*\*Note: The notion of an evil person in Jodo Shinshu encompasses more than the conventional moral or ethical meaning of evil. Perhaps it refers more accurately to the notion of sentient beings who are full of kleshas or desires. Shinran Shonin often referred to himself as an evil person.*

### 7.2 Who Is An Evil Person?

*Who is an evil person?* The conclusive answer to this question is that the evil person is none other than us: all of us are persons full of evil passions. In other words, we are the sole object of Amida's act of salvation. Because we are ignorant, we are not truly aware of our self. We see our self through a veil that shows that we are good persons and better than others. While we always consider others to be at fault, we see our self as right and good. It is very difficult to see our true self. Thus, we live in the great gap between the true self and the veiled self.

When we are illuminated by the light of Amida – the light of true reality – we become aware of the true self. We become aware that we are nothing but an evil person – filled with blind passions – rather than a good person. This change occurs when we sit in front of Amida and listen to the dharma. In other words, we are no longer looking at the veiled self but becoming aware of the self that is seen through the wisdom eyes of Amida Buddha. We become aware that realization of the true self comes from sitting in front of Amida's mirror.

Shinran Shonin sat in front of Amida's mirror throughout his life and became aware of his true self. Awakening to his true appearance, he uttered in despair:

*Since I am absolutely incapable of any religious practices, hell is my only home.*

### 7.3 Self As It Is

*What then is my life as an evil person?*

Firstly, it is a life that turns its back on true reality. This is called *shinnyo hai han* i.e. living only by turning our back against the truth. In our daily lives, we turn continually away from true reality. We see permanence in impermanence and the infinite in the finite, lacking awareness of the suffering in our lives. Similarly, we see joy in non-joy, foolishly repeating that “joy” which will continue to create suffering. It seems that we can only lead a life of erroneous views, seeing purity in impurity, and existence in a self which has no real body and does not exist. Yet, we continually attach to this body and continue to be bound by this illusory self. Because of our fundamental ignorance, we turn against true reality and lack awareness of being an evil person.

As Shinran Shonin writes in one of his hymns:

*Extremely difficult it is to put an end to our evil nature; the mind  
is like a poisonous snake. Our performance of good acts  
is also poisoned; hence, it is called false and empty practices.*

Hymns of Lament and Reflection

Secondly, all of us possess the potential for evil actions. When conditions are ripe, we may commit wrong deeds e.g. under the conditions of war, we may kill people. We often laugh at other people’s stupidity and criticize other people’s evil acts. It is very difficult to become aware that we also have the potential to repeat the same stupid acts. Shinran Shonin’s quote: *Extremely difficult it is to put an end to our evil nature* reveals our true nature. We are evil persons who are always prepared to commit stupid or wrong acts when the conditions are ripe.

Thirdly, we lack the goodness which will bring attainment of Buddhahood and rebirth in the Pure Land. The seemingly good acts in our daily lives cannot possibly be the absolute good. Deep within, our acts are always calculated to satisfy the ego. Even though we may do our best for others and help others, there is always a slight expectation that such acts will bring us some good in return. It may be the case that absolute good cannot exist in our world. But when we are illuminated by the light of Amida Buddha, we awaken to the realization that we are evil persons.

### 7.4 Within the Light

When Shinran Shonin awakened to his true self as an evil person, he reached the edge of despair: *Since I am absolutely incapable of any religious practices, hell is my only home.* Did his life then end in defeat and failure? A life filled with such dark self-hatred may not be worth living. Yet, even though Shinran Shonin looked deep within and observed himself with disdain, there was not the slightest shadow of darkness in him. Instead, his life filled with brightness as it unfolded.

While in despair, Shinran Shonin suddenly became aware of another great force. He realized that *I am nothing but an evil person* and *I have nowhere to go except hell* are both within the light of Amida Buddha. When we are unaware that things cannot be seen without light, we become arrogant and

conceited. When we say that we see things, we must realize that both the things that are seen as well as the one who sees are within the light. While we think that we see with our own strength, in reality, we are only able to see because of the light. Thus, we see Shinran Shonin's despair turning to great joy:

*When one has boarded the ship of great compassion, and sailed out into the vast ocean of light, the winds of perfect virtue blow softly, and the waves of evil are transformed.*

So to say that the teachings are aimed at the evil person means that when we become aware of our true self, we realize that we are living within the light of Amida Buddha.

## 8 REBIRTH IN THE PURE LAND

### 8.1 The Teachings on Birth in the Pure Land

We often hear that it is useless to give dharma talks on birth in the Pure Land to modern people because they are not concerned about life after death, nor do they desire to be born in the Pure Land. *Is this true?* Our sangha is called Jodo Shinshu (true sect of Pure Land). *Birth in the Pure Land* is the 3<sup>rd</sup> essential teaching of our sect of Buddhism.

People often say that they do not understand what the Pure Land is. In our modern educational system, which is based on the science of logic and proof, that which cannot be verified by the senses is not accepted. We never doubt the accuracy of what we see. We simply accept that what we see with our eyes exists. But we must question this belief. No matter how good our eyesight may be, nothing can be seen without light. Thus, saying that only what we see exists is foolish.

Furthermore, whether the Pure Land exists or not, or can be clearly shown to exist, is not a critical component of shinjin or the nembutsu. They exist without the necessity of establishing the existence of the Pure Land. In Shinran Shonin's writings or in Shakyamuni's discourses (sutras), there is no evidence that the Pure Land exists. Thus, the important question to ask is not: *Where is the proof that the Pure Land exists?* but to first ask the question: *Who am I?*

When we ultimately enter into the world of shinjin and the nembutsu by pursuing the dharma in depth, the existence of the Pure Land becomes real and true. Thus, even though studies throughout the scientific world may logically deny its existence, we can affirm the Pure Land's existence without doubt.

### 8.2 What is the Pure Land?

It is a mistake to say that the Pure Land is *ultimate joy*. Rennyo, a future leader of the Jodo Shinshu sect, states:

*To understand the Pure Land as gokuraku (ultimate joy), simply a place to enjoy and to seek such a place, we will never attain Buddhahood.*

Similarly, T'an-luan states:

*If a person without awakening to the ultimate bodhi mind wishes to be born into the Pure Land, simply seeking joy in this other realm will not bring birth into the Pure Land.*

What they are saying is that our unfulfilled desires cannot be fulfilled in the Pure Land. The Pure Land is the realm of true reality and light in contrast to our temporary world of illusion and darkness. As described in various sutras, the Pure Land shows the manifestation of Buddha's mind of compassion. Thus, the Pure Land is the source from which Amida's Buddha's great compassion flows. Furthermore, to be born in the Pure Land is to simultaneously attain Buddhahood. Since attaining Buddhahood

through practice is easily available in the Pure Land, it is understood as a realm into which we are born in order to ultimately become a Buddha.

*The person who attains real and true shinjin  
Immediately enters the stage of the truly settled,  
Thus having entered into the stage of non-retrogression  
Will necessarily realize nirvana.*

Hymns of the Pure Land (28)

*The person who rejoices in shinjin  
Is equal to Tathagata; so it is taught  
Great shinjin is Buddha-nature  
Buddha-nature is none other than Tathagata.*

Hymns of the Pure Land (94)

### 8.3 What Does Rebirth Mean?

The Japanese term *ojo* (rebirth) is often misused to mean *in trouble, a dead end situation* or *to die*. Its original meaning however has none of these connotations. The term *ojo* comes from the basic teachings of the Buddha. It is used in conjunction with the principle of causal origination or non-ego/voidness. In essence, what we consider ego does not possess a permanent entity. All is empty e.g. all existence is made up of causes and conditions. Thus, what we see at present is only temporary existence. T'an-luan called such existence a transient person in this realm.

In the basic principles of Buddhism, we cannot accept permanent, unchanging, existing entities since we have temporary existence, based on causes and conditions. Because of such causal conditions, we can attain Buddhahood. In other words, because we have temporary existence and can change, we can become a Buddha. Thus, *ojo* means to be reborn from the world of illusion into the enlightened world, to be transformed from ordinary beings into Buddhas. Death is still death but it loses the meaning of the absolute negation of life. Instead, death offers the opportunity to be reborn into eternal life.

This does not mean however that awakening occurs only after death. We do not suddenly enter into the Pure Land at the moment of death. We may think that reciting the nembutsu is like an incantation or magical spell so that when we die, Amida will come and take us to the Pure Land. Shinran Shonin denies that we are received by Amida Buddha at the moment of death. He warns us that when we recite the nembutsu:

*Even if our mouth be split, we should not say 'after we die, we are received by the Buddha'.*

Rather, at the moment we receive shinjin and recite the nembutsu, we are already embraced by Amida.

Shinran Shonin further states:

*When the thought of wanting to say the nembutsu emerges from deep within, at that very moment, we are grasped never to be abandoned, receiving the ultimate benefit.*

Tannisho

In other words, the journey to the Pure Land begins at the very moment we receive shinjin. It is not a path that we create but a path that opens to us from the Pure Land. This path is related to our daily life. Today's life of illusion, just as it is, is the path to the Pure Land. As we recite the nembutsu, we are already walking towards the Pure Land. It is a path that continues towards rebirth in the Pure Land and the attainment of Buddhahood.

Our lives are forever connected to the illusory world. *What value can be placed on such a life?* This life takes on a great meaning when we graciously receive the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. The person who does this is called *shojoju* – one who is rightly established or one who is equal to the Tathagata. Shinran Shonin's life was truly the path of rebirth in the Pure Land. As a result, he was filled with great joy, hope and peace, and blessed with strength. His life shows us how the concept of rebirth in the Pure Land teaches us how to live with the true objective of rightful living.



## Part Two

# Jodo Shinshu Practices

*Note: While the following sections describe the formal practices of Jodo Shinshu followers, today ministers and lay followers both inside Japan and outside Japan have become more informal in their practices.*

## 9 JUZU, GASSHO AND SHOKO

As nembutsu followers of Jodo Shinshu, we should conduct ourselves in our daily lives according to a proper understanding of Shinran Shonin's teachings. In the following paragraphs, we will try to explain the importance of Shinshu practices.

### 9.1 Juzu (contemplation beads)

#### 9.1.1 *Whenever and Wherever*

Juzu (contemplation beads), sometimes called *nenju*, is an important dharma object used in worship before a shrine. We should form the habit of carrying our juzu at all times as it is one of the most important practices for one who recites the nembutsu. Whether at home or outside, we are reminded of our great teachings by touching the juzu.



*Juzu*

Some people leave juzu in different places so it is readily available when they wish to use it. When you are purchasing juzu, make sure that it is the kind used by our sect of Buddhism. Different Buddhist sects use different forms of juzu.

#### 9.1.2 *Usage*

Juzu is used at the time of worship or in gassho. With the hands clasped in front, the juzu is firmly placed between the thumbs and fingers with the tassel hanging down. When you are not using the juzu, place it on the left wrist; when you are sitting down, the left hand should be over the right hand. When you remove the juzu, handle it with gentle care and do not place it on the floor. Even when you place it on a table, you should place it on top of a clean cloth.

### 9.2 Gassho (placing palms together) and Bowing

There are various methods of worship. The most formal way is called *gotaitochi*, which means to prostrate oneself before the shrine. Another way is walking around the shrine with the right shoulder always facing the shrine. A third way is to bow while standing or sitting. In our sect, we practice gassho and deep bowing.

#### 9.2.1 *3,000 years of Gassho*

The practice of gassho originated in India. In that country, one uses the phrase *Namaste* to greet a person, meaning *hello*, *thank you* and *goodbye*. *Namaste* means "with respect, I greet you". When the people in India greet each other in this way, they generally place their hands in gassho. Used at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha over 2500 years ago, the practice of gassho has spread across countries and time, and has been introduced to Japan as well as North America. When we think of its history, we should sincerely appreciate and feel the weight of this tradition.

### 9.2.2 *The practice of gassho*

When we are in gassho, we clasp our hands together in front of the chest with the fingers pointing upwards naturally at a 45 degree angle. Four fingers are clasped together with the juzu placed between the pointing fingers and the thumbs. While the thumbs firmly grasp the juzu, the shoulders and elbows are relaxed. The eyes should be looking respectfully at the Buddha while we repeat the nembutsu. After this gesture, bend your upper body at a 45 degree angle and worship. After returning to the upright position, bring the hands to the side with the juzu on the left wrist.

## 9.3 **Guko (offering incense)**

As with the practice of offering flowers and food, the practice of offering incense is a very important part of our ritual.

### 9.3.1 *Shoko*

Shoko is the practice of burning incense in front of the shrine during services. At these services, we place powdered incense in the burning incense container and let the smoke rise.

### 9.3.2 *Shoko stand*

If possible, make a stand to hold the koro (incense burner).

### 9.3.3 *The practice of Shoko*

1. Bow about 2-3 steps before the incense stand
2. Step up to the stand, take the incense container lid off and place it on the right side of the container with the lid leaning on the container
3. Take a pinch of incense powder and place it on the burner
4. Replace the lid on the container
5. Gassho, recite the nembutsu and bow
6. Step back 2-3 steps and bow.

#### Notes:

- Steps 2 and 4 can be eliminated if the container is already open
- Step 6 can be eliminated if there are other people waiting behind you
- Bow slightly when you cross in front of worshippers
- Even though there may be a bell or gong on the incense stand, do not ring it when offering incense.

## 9.4 **Clothing**

When attending a temple service, it is not necessary to wear special clothes. However, one should be clean and washed, and wear clean clothes.

## 9.5 Montoshikisho (Sash)



*Montoshikisho*

In addition to juzu, we wear a montoshikisho at services. This is equivalent to the *wagesa* that a minister wears. Although it is not necessary to wear the montoshikisho all the time, it should be worn at important services as well as weddings and funerals. Remember that there is a front and a back to a montoshikisho and wear it correctly.

## 10 THE LIFE OF A NEMBUTSU FOLLOWER

### 10.1 5 & 8 Precepts

At the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, lay Buddhist followers practiced the five basic precepts of:

- no killing
- no stealing
- no lying
- no sexual misconduct
- no intoxicating substances.

On the 8<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> days of each month, followers also practiced three additional precepts:

- no sitting in comfortable high seats and no sleeping in comfortable beds
- no adornments or use of jewelry or perfume, and no attendance at places of entertainment
- no eating after mid-day.

In southern Asian countries such as Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka, these precepts are still strictly observed. Such practices, even in ancient times, would have been very uncomfortable and restrictive. For people today who are used to freedom without restrictions, such precepts may seem a thing of the past. However, since we live with such freedom, observing the precepts can be a very meaningful and healthy way to strengthen our Buddhist practice. Religion is belief and conviction. We can demonstrate our conviction on a daily basis by practicing the precepts.

### 10.2 Early Period of Jodo Shinshu Practice

Since Shinran Shonin's time, there has been discussion on how to practice as a nembutsu follower given a lack of clearly defined practices in the Jodo Shinshu teachings. In Chapter 13 of the *Tannisho*, Shinran Shonin warns against deliberately practicing evil deeds. As Jodo Shinshu teachings began to flourish, some people misinterpreted the teachings to mean that the more evil a person is, the more Amida's compassion will reach out to them and help them gain salvation. Shinran Shonin however was saddened by these arrogant views among believers of Shin teachings. Rennyō often quoted Shinran Shonin's words: "*followers of the Buddha Dharma must not conduct themselves as if they are assured of birth in the Pure Land*". (Epistle 3-11).

Furthermore, Shinran Shonin says:

*"Conduct oneself righteously, politely, intellectually and with correct belief. Observe the law of the country"*.

### 10.3 Articles of Jodo Shinshu Faith

Above all, religious beliefs must be meaningful in daily life. They should not be simple armchair philosophy or mere intellectual studies. While Jodo Shinshu teaches rebirth in the Pure Land, it strongly emphasizes that the dharma follower should live a daily life of happiness, harmony and peace.

This latter aspect – that Jodo Shinshu is a movement to create a better life among its followers – is generally not stressed enough. In 1969, before the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shinran Shonin’s birth, the Monshu Katsunyo (Monshu Kosho Ohtani) issued a statement of the essentials of Jodo Shinshu:

*Name:* Jodo Shinshu Honpa Hongwanji

*Founder:* Shinran Shonin (1173 – 1263)

*Buddha:* Amida Buddha (Buddha of Infinite Light & Life – *Namo Amida Butsu*)

*Sutra:* Three Principle Sutras of Jodo Shinshu:  
1. Larger Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life (Daikyo)  
2. Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life (Kangyo)  
3. Smaller Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life (Shokyo)

*Teaching:* Having awakened to the compassion of Amida Buddha and rejoicing in the assurance of Buddhahood, we shall endeavor to live the life of gratitude and service.

*Tradition:* The Honpa Hongwanji is a community of people joined together by the gladness of receiving the Shinjin of Amida Buddha. As Jodo Shin Buddhists, we shall seek to be humble and sincere in words and deeds, to be responsible citizens of our society and to share with others the teachings of Jodo Shinshu. Understanding fully the principle of causality, we shall not practice petitionary prayer and magic, and do not depend on astrology and superstitions.

The Monshu provided an explanation for issuing this statement:

*“With the approach of Shinran Shonin’s 800<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, we who follow Jodo Shinshu must propagate the teachings with joy and strength. Yet, even after this long tradition of the teachings, many members have become followers in name only without understanding the true meaning of the Jodo Shinshu teachings. For Shinran’s 90 years of hardship, I sincerely feel responsible for and apologize for this corruption. Accordingly, I have decided to present the essentials of Jodo Shinshu to clarify its true meaning.*

*These essentials of Jodo Shinshu set forth the most important basic understanding for the people of our sect. The followers must deeply accept these essentials and accept the true value as Shin followers. Ministers must thoroughly reveal the purpose of these essentials and together make an attempt to reveal the true meaning of the dharma.*

*May the true meaning of the dharma flourish with the ministries and lay people together making an effort for the sake of our sect.*

*Monshu Kosho Ohtani  
April 15, 1969*

## 10.4 Sacred Books of Jodo Shinshu

Terms such as “a great collection of sutras”, “the entire scriptures of Buddhism” and “the three baskets” (*Tripitaka*) have been used historically to describe the entire collection of Buddhist teachings. Of these terms, “the three baskets” refers to *sutras*, the *vinaya* and the *abhidharma*. Sutras are compilations of the dharma talks delivered by Shakyamuni Buddha. The vinaya refers to the daily precepts and rules of behaviour followed by monks and nuns (bhikshus and bhikshunis). The abhidharma is a collection of commentaries by later Buddhist scholars on the sutras and vinaya. Buddhist scriptures are entirely contained in these three baskets. Furthermore, the scholar monks who translated the Tripitaka into Chinese (Han language) are generally called dharma teachers on the Tripitaka. Among these scholars, the most famous is Genjo (Hsuan-Chuang in Chinese) who translated more than 1300 articles.

The sutras, vinaya and abhidharma were produced on different occasions at various places. To prevent their loss and dispersal across too many places, and to ensure that the teachings were properly transmitted after Shakyamuni Buddha passed away, there were many attempts to compile them. When we consider all the commentaries made in China, Japan and other countries, they may well comprise more than several thousand chapters.

In the case of Jodo Shinshu followers, our three basic sutras are:

- Larger Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life
- Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life
- Smaller Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life.

If read just by themselves, the Buddhist teachings can be very difficult to understand. As a result, scholar monks in India, China and Japan wrote commentaries to clarify their meaning from their perspectives. Shinran Shonin also wrote commentaries. Among many works which reveal the Buddha’s true teachings, Shinran Shonin’s major work is called *Kyogyoshinsho*, *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*. *Shoshinge* (*Gatha of the True Shinjin*) – which we chant daily in front of our family shrine – is actually a part of *Kyogyoshinsho*.

## 10.5 Seiten (Service Book)

The followers of Jodo Shinshu conduct a daily service in front of the family shrine. At this service, *Shoshinge* and other teachings should be read in order to understand them more deeply. The *seiten*, or service book of Jodo Shinshu, generally contains the following teachings:

1. Essentials of Jodo Shinshu
2. Shinshu Pledge
3. Homage
4. Shoshinge
5. Junirai
6. Sanbutsuge
7. Juseige
8. Sanbujo
9. Bussetsu Amida Kyo

10. Kisanboge
11. Gobunsho (Epistles of Rennyo Shonin)
12. Wasan (songs)
13. Gatha (poems)

### **Ryogemon (Jodo Shinshu Pledge)**

This pledge reveals the essence of the attitudes that Jodo Shinshu followers should adopt in life after receiving shinjin.

#### **Seikatsu Shinjo (Shinshu Pledge)**

1. *I take my refuge in the vow of the Buddha. Reciting his sacred name, I will live through life with strength and serenity.*
2. *I adore the light of the Buddha. I will put my effort in my work with self-reflection and gratitude.*
3. *I follow the teachings of the Buddha. Knowing I am on the right path, I will spread the true dharma.*
4. *I rejoice in the compassion of the Buddha. I will respect and help others and do my best for the welfare of mankind.*

### **Shoshinge**

The first section of *Shoshinge* explains Shinran's interpretations of Amida Buddha's vows. The second and third sections contain interpretations of the seven patriarchs, from Nagarjuna to Honen.

### **Junirai**

This gatha is said to be written by Nagarjuna, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the seven patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu. In its 12 stanzas, the poem praises the virtues of Amida Buddha and the sacredness of the Pure Land.

### **Sanbutsuge (Praises of the Buddha)**

*Sanbutsuge* appears in the *Larger Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life*. In this gatha, Bodhisattva Dharmakara made 48 vows to save all beings who are suffering in the world of illusion. Upon fulfilling his vows, Dharmakara became Amida Buddha.

### **Juseige**

These verses from the *Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra* are repeated in order to show that the 48 vows promised to us by Bodhisattva Dharmakara are true. Without fail, these promises or vows will save all sentient beings. This gatha is sometimes called *Sanseige* (Three Sacred Vows).

## Bussetsu Amida Kyo

This sutra is one of the three important sutras for Jodo Shinshu followers. First delivered by Shakyamuni Buddha to his disciple Shariputra at Sravasti, it describes the realm of Amida Buddha's Pure Land. It also describes how the Buddhas of the 10 quarters pay homage to Amida Buddha.

## Kisanboge

This chant is repeated after the *Ti-Sarana* (Homage) in front of the casket at funerals. In it, Shan-tao asks for rebirth in the Pure Land.

## Gobunsho (*Epistles of Rennyo*)

From the time that Rennyo Shonin became the 8<sup>th</sup> Monshu at age 40 until his demise at age 85, he wrote approximately 200 letters to followers of Jodo Shinshu teachings. Rennyo Shonin's grandson – Ennyo Shonin – selected 80 of these letters and compiled them into five volumes called Gobunsho. The 11<sup>th</sup> Monshu (Kennyō Shonin) then added 28 more letters for a total of 108 letters that may be used in services.

## Wasan (*Songs*)

Shinran wrote over 300 songs (hymns) in Japanese to explain his writings in *Kyogyoshinsho* (which was written in Chinese). *Jodo Wasan* are Hymns of the Pure Land, *Koso Wasan* are Hymns on the Seven Patriarchs and *Shozomatsu Wasan* are Hymns of the Dharma Ages.

## Gatha

Various Buddhist gatha or poems are sung during services. This practice is optional.

## 10.6 Conduct for Daily Service

It is very important for Jodo Shinshu followers to conduct a service in front of the *butsudan* (Buddhist shrine) every morning and evening. For this daily service, Rennyo Shonin selected the following service order:

- *Shoshinge*
- nembutsu
- six wasan
- eko.

This service has been conducted daily for more than 500 years with very few changes to the service order.

### Service Preparation

- ensure that you are washed and dressed appropriately
- place your nenju on your wrist

- open the butsudan and bow slightly
- put fresh water in the flower vase
- light the candles
- lay the incense stick on the incense container (in Jodo Shinshu, the incense stick is not placed upright in the container)
- make the rice offering
- place the rin (bell) on the front of the shrine to the right.

#### Starting the Service

- gassho and bow
- take the mallet out of the rin and hit the inside of the bell in an upwards motion
- place the mallet on the side
- begin chanting *Shoshinge*.

#### Chanting *Shoshinge*

- during ordinary services, *Shoshinge* is chanted in the *sofu* style and during memorial and other important services, it is chanted in the *gyofu* style.
- as a rule, *Shoshinge* should be chanted from memory.

#### After *Shoshinge*

- hit the bell once
- repeat the nembutsu – on the 3<sup>rd</sup> nembutsu, the leader picks up the wasan book, and raises it to the forehead before opening it
- six wasan
- eko
  - after the second line of eko is chanted (*byo do se issai*), the leader closes the wasan book and again raises it to the forehead before placing it aside
  - ring the bell three times during the last few words of eko (*an rakkoku*)
- place the mallet on the side of the shrine
- gassho and bow
- place the mallet inside the bell
- take the epistle out of the gobunsho, open it and raise it opened to the forehead
- read the epistle
- at the end of the reading, raise the epistle to the forehead while repeating “with reverence” and close it while repeating “I remain”.

#### After the Service

- take the rice off the shrine
- extinguish the candles
- place the rin inside the butsudan
- close the doors of the butsudan
- bow slightly.

## 11 BUTSUDAN (Buddhist Shrine)

### 11.1 Forms of Butsudan

#### 11.1.1 Differences Found in Various Sects

At present, there are various forms of butsudan according to different sects. Generally speaking, the butsudan in the home is based on the form of the shrine in the mother temple. The shrine at our temple in Calgary, along with its various adornments, depicts the Pure Land as described in the sutras and the teachings.

The main statues in a butsudan, as well as the images on the sides, will also differ according to the sects. Even between Honpa (Nishi Hongwanji) and Ohtani-ha (Higashi Honwanji), there are differences in the form, the lintel (hanging lantern), the stand, the use of 3 or 5 containers etc. When purchasing a butsudan, please make note of these characteristics.

#### 11.1.2 Gold Lacquered Butsudan and Natural Wood Butsudan

Butsudan can be divided into two major forms. First is the gold lacquered butsudan where the inside is covered with gold foil and the outside is painted black and lacquered. The containers in this butsudan are usually made of brass to show dignity in adornment. Jodo Shinshu sects use this type of butsudan.

In the second type of butsudan, made of natural wood, the natural wood grains are preserved by using such woods as rosewood, ebony and lauan, as well as artificial woods. The style of this butsudan is subdued so gold or brilliant colours are not usually used. This type of butsudan is typically used by other sects.

#### 11.1.3 Regional Colours and New Butsudan

During the long history of skilled craftsmen making butsudan, the forms of butsudan in various regions showed the individual characteristics associated with those regions. In recent years, however, due to the easier exchange of skills among craftsmen as well as the increasing costs of making butsudan, the regional characteristics of butsudan are gradually fading. By simplifying the art and craft of making butsudan, craftsmen today are returning to the traditional or *zushi* style of butsudan.

*\*Note: See the Appendix for definitions and pictures of the decorations used on the butsudan.*

### 11.2 Decorating the Butsudan

The main Buddha in the Jodo Shinshu sect is called Amida Tathagata. Shinran Shonin said of Amida Tathagata: “*adhere to the Buddha of Inconceivable Light*” (*namo fuka shigi ko nyorai*) or “*surrendering to the Buddha of unimpeded light that extends to all corners of the universe*” (*kimyo jin jippo muge ko nyorai*).

In the butsudan, we place the Chinese characters *Namo Amida Butsu*, an image of Amida Buddha or

a wooden statue of Amida Buddha. The Buddha is generally represented in a sitting or standing form. All Jodo Shinshu sects however, including Hongwanji, use the standing image with the exception of the Kibe-ha sect.

When Amida Buddha is portrayed in pictures, he stands on a lotus flower with 48 rays extending out from the centre of two circles of light at the back of his head. In the case of wooden statues of Amida Buddha, he stands on top of a lotus flower and in front of a flaming light with 48 rays extending out from the lotus.

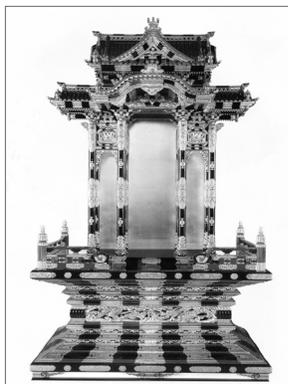
The Amida Buddha in Jodo Shinshu has the right hand extended in front of the right shoulder with the thumb and index finger forming a circle. His left arm is pointing downward from his left shoulder with the thumb and index finger also forming a circle. These hand gestures are called *mudras* and express various meanings. The right hand gesture pose is called *semus* (*fearlessly extending help to suffering beings*). The left hand gesture is called *yoga-in* (*extending vows*). Together these mudras are called *seppo-in* (*expressing the dharma*). Today these signs are sometimes referred to as *raigo-in* (*taking aspirants to the Pure Land by Amida Buddha*) or *sesshu-fusha-in* (*being taken in and never abandoned*).

### Shumidan (Shrine Platform)

In Jodo Shinshu sects, the statue of Amida Buddha is placed inside the *kuden* (case) in the centre of the shrine which is on the shumidan (platform or table). Other sacred images, like the *Omyogo* (6 Chinese characters) or images of Amida Buddha, are placed on the shumidan as well. To show respect, *buttengai* (canopy to shade Buddha) is hung on top of the figure.

*Note 1:* The *kuden* is considered the residing place of Amida Buddha in the Pure Land. Hence, it has no doors.

*Note 2:* In case of wooden statues, the height of the statue and *daiza* (lotus stand) are generally the same height. The statue should be balanced with the rest of the shrine.



*Kuden*



*Shumidan*

*Note 3:* The images or statues of Amida Buddha can be purchased at stores that sell Buddhist articles. However, Hongwanji requires that their *shikibu* (ministry of ceremonies) examine the statue to show that it has been approved. *Omyogo* (6 Chinese characters) can be purchased at Hongwanji.

**Tocho**

Tocho means *veil covering the statue*. The tocho is hung over the statue of Buddha and in front of the last posts of the kuden. The Ohtani-ha sect does not use tocho.

*Note:* Tocho should only cover the top part of the Buddha's head and not hide the face of the Buddha completely.

*Tocho***Hotaku (Ornaments)**

The ornaments that hang from the bustudan are a representation of the bells that traditionally hung from temple roofs. For example, six hotaku hang from the kuden of Amida at the mother temple in Kyoto. In the butsudan, the hotaku are hung individually on either side or in pairs.

*Hotaku***Kanetoro (Metal lanterns)**

Hexagon-shaped metal lanterns are used on both sides of the shrine to light the face of Amida Buddha. On ordinary days, the lanterns are closed with the doors facing forward but when in use, the lanterns should be turned 180 degrees with the doors open. Spherical-shaped lanterns are used only on the outside of the temple.

*Kanetoro***Uwajoku (Small altar table)**

A smaller altar table, called *uwajoku*, is placed in front of the shrine. On the candle stand, an unlit red wooden candle is placed.

*Uwajoku*

### Kasha (Incense burner)

The kasha or incense burner has 3 legs – it should be placed in such a way that one leg is in front with two legs behind. A flower vase was used originally as a container to place scented water on the shrine but today, small branches of *shikimi* (scented leaves) are placed on the shrine in the shape of a lotus bud.



*Kasha*

### Obuppan (Rice offering)

Rice offerings are placed on both sides of the *kebyo* (flower vase). They are offered generally in the morning and withdrawn by noon. Bread can replace rice in western homes. If rice is offered, it should be taken to the shrine before the family begins its meal. In the case of a butsudān without uwajoku, first place the rice on a *guhandai* (rice offering stand) before placing it in front of the shrine.



*Guhandai*

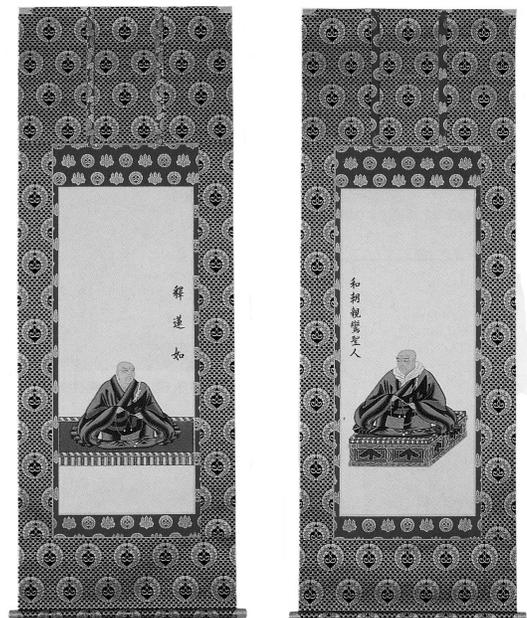
### Other Offerings

In addition to rice, other shrine offerings consist of fruits and sweets. Fish or animal meats are not offered. The offerings should be placed in such a manner that the butsudān is decorated as if it were in the Pure Land. Offerings should always be placed in a container and never directly on the shumidan. It is recommended that offerings be placed on the butsudān on a daily basis.

### Wakigake (Side Objects of Honour)

Either Shinran's image or a 10 character *myogo* (Amida's name on a scroll) is hung on the right side of the shrine. Rennyō's image or a 9 character *myogo* is hung on the left side.

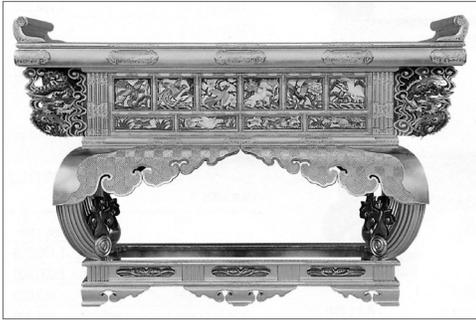
*Note:* Do not place ornaments or incantations from other sects in the butsudān.



*Images of Rennyō (left) and Shinran (right)*

### Maejoku (Large Table in Front of the Shumidan) – Stand for 3 or 5 Containers

The practice of using the maejoku developed from *tokonoma* – a traditional Japanese alcove in which art is displayed. The maejoku was first used at Shinran Shonin's gravesite and continues to be used today in the Goedo (hall enshrining Shinran Shonin). In the Amida-do (hall enshrining Amida Buddha at the mother temple), the maejoku is ordinarily not used. Even when the maejoku is used on special occasions at the Amida-do, it contains a minimum of containers – only two flower vases and an earthen incense burner are used.



*Maejoku*



*Décor for Maejoku*

#### Décor for Maejoku

The maejoku holds 3 or 5 containers, consisting of an incense burner, flower vases and candle holders. When 3 containers are used – flower vase, incense burner and candle holder – place the vase on the left side, the incense burner in the middle, and the candle stand on the right. In the case of 5 containers, place a flower vase and candle holder on either side of the incense burner.

#### Candle

During ordinary services, including funeral and memorial services, white candles are generally used on the maejoku. During Hoonko, wedding and commemorative services, red or gold coloured candles are used. It is advisable to always use fresh candles. After each service, the candles should be discarded and replaced with new ones. In Japan, *warosoku* (ceremonial candles) are used instead of western style candles.

#### Flower Arrangements

Flowers are arranged according to *ikebana* – the Japanese art of flower arranging. Generally speaking, the height of the flowers should be four times the height of the container. The vase should always have fresh water. It has been the tradition at funeral and memorial services to avoid bright or gaudy flowers.



*Uchishiki*

### Uchishiki (Gold Embroidered Cloth)

The uchishiki was originally used at the Imperial Palace as a carpet. It then developed into a cloth used underneath containers such as flower vases, candle holders and incense burners. Today, the uchishiki is used only during special services. The uchishiki used in maejoku and uwajoku are generally square or diamond-shaped, and secured by a board called a *mizuita*. The uchishiki should cover all four corners of the stand. In the case of the butsudan, a triangular-shaped uchishiki is used. At funeral and memorial services, silver or white uchishiki are used instead of a gold cloth.

*Note 1:* The Hongwanji sect uses flower designs on the uchishiki while the Ohtani sect uses dragon designs.

*Note 2:* When 5 containers are used, an additional cloth called a *mizuhiki* is used underneath the uchishiki.

### Rinto (Circular Lantern)

This particular type of lantern was adapted from the Imperial Palace and is used only in the Jodo Shinshu sect. The Hongwanji sect uses circular lanterns with chrysanthemum, peony, cloud and dragon designs while the Ohtani sect uses simple semi-circular lanterns. Each lantern contains two or three wicks made from a vegetable oil such as canola.

*Note:* Rinto must be hung in balance with the rest of the shrine e.g. not too low or below the flower vases, and facing outward. There may be front and back designs in some rinto so care should be taken to hang them properly.



*Rinto*

**Rin (Bell or Small Gong)**

Rin consists of a bell, cushion and *bachi* (mallet) which are placed on top of the rindai or bell stand. The Ohtani sect uses a square stand while Hongwanji uses a hexagonal or round stand. There are two types of rin – one that uses thick metal and a thinly constructed rin called *sawari*. Normally, the rin is placed on the right hand corner of the lowest level of the butsudan with the mallet inside the rin. When used for services, it is placed on the right side, and in front, of the person conducting the service. The correct method of striking the bell is to hit the inside of the bell in an upward motion. Rin is only used during the service; it is not used during incense burning or rice offerings.



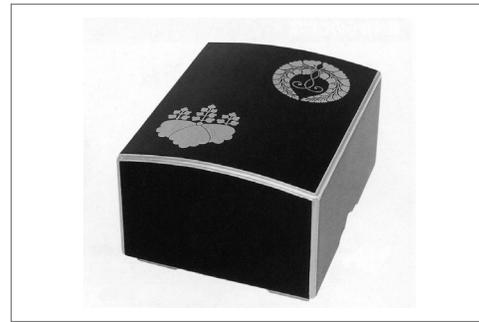
*Rin, cushion and Bachi*

*Note 1:* Care should be taken in using the rin since it will not ring if it is damaged, chipped or cracked. It can be polished occasionally with metal polish.

*Note 2:* Rin should not be used as a waste container.



*Wasan Bako*



*Gobunsho Bako*

**Wasan Bako (Box Containing Shinran Shonin's Hymns)**

The wasan box, which is usually black-lacquered, contains *Shoshinge* and *Sanjo Wasan*, including:

- *Jodo Wasan* = Hymns on the Pure Land
- *Koso Wasan* = Hymns on the seven patriarchs
- *Shozomatsu Wasan* = Hymns on the period of decadence.

**Gobunsho Bako (Box Containing Rennyō Shonin's Epistles)**

The gobunsho is usually placed in the left drawer of the butsudan.

### Kogo (Incense Box)



*Kogo*

Kogo is the container for powdered incense and is kept in the drawer of the butsudan. When a service is being conducted, the incense is taken from the kogo and placed on the incense burner. Matches and other used items should be placed in a small container with a lid called *kyuji bako*.

### **Conclusion**

This explanation of the traditional adornments and arrangements of the butsudan is provided mainly as a reference. Jodo Shinshu followers should use the traditions that are appropriate for their butsudan. However, no matter how small or simple the butsudan, the following manners should be observed:

- a. Arrange the kuden, keman, tocho, images (e.g. Amida Buddha) and uwajoku in their proper places, using either 3 or 5 containers for flowers and candles.
- b. Always keep the butsudan clean and tidy, and the flower water fresh.
- c. Take care of the candles and incense after the service is finished.
- d. Always attend the butsudan with respect.
- e. Strive to have all members of the family attend daily services.

*Note 1:* Butsudan can be purchased or acquired at any time. While there is no specific location for the butsudan, it should be placed in the most important part of the house.

*Note 2:* Ask your minister for advice if you need to repair the butsudan.

## 12 SERVICES

The essence of religion is the spiritual mind, not how religious services are conducted or what materials are used. Our Jodo Shinshu services and activities are also based on the spiritual mind. In other words, passionate belief must be there as a foundation. Thus, services and ceremonies are designed to bring out and heighten our religious beliefs. The purpose of Jodo Shinshu services and ceremonies is to reveal our pure faith in the Buddha and to help us reflect on the Tathagata. To reflect on the words of the Buddha is to repeatedly hear the dharma and thus purify ourselves, whether we are in a state of sorrow or delight. When we sit in front of the Buddha, observe his exalted image and conduct the service, it causes us to hear and contemplate the dharma. Furthermore, it becomes a condition for following the Buddhist path as the basic principle of Jodo Shinshu services and ceremonies is the dharma.

### 12.1 Funeral

Even though no one wishes to die, all life will end some day. For human beings, the funeral has always served as one of the most important events in human life. Therefore, it should be conducted with the utmost effort and dignity. The recent trend in conducting funerals is to make them more elaborate and formalized. The result however has been only a change in outward appearances without deeper religious meaning. As a nembutsu follower, let us discover the true meaning of the funeral and its function.

#### Pillow Service (Service Conducted at the Deathbed)

At a person's dying moments, sutras are chanted in order to give the nembutsu follower the chance to hear the dharma for the last time. This service should be conducted while the person is alive so he or she can repeat the nembutsu with others around them. It is recommended that all present chant Amida Kyo which contains the phrase:

*“When life comes to an end, the aspirant’s mind will not fall into confusion and so he will be born in the land of utmost bliss of Amida Buddha”.*

#### Suggested Service Order

1. Strike the rin twice
2. Chant Amida Kyo
3. Strike the rin once
4. Chant the nembutsu and repeat
5. Strike the rin
6. Chant the nembutsu five times
7. Strike the rin
8. Chant the nembutsu several times
9. Wasan
10. Eko (dedication)
11. Strike the rin twice

When a person dies, his or her eyes should be closed and the hands placed on the chest. Clean sheets are put on the bed and the deceased person is dressed in clean clothes. Following these steps, ministers, relatives and friends are contacted.

The pillow service should be conducted in front of the family butsudān. After this service, arrangements for the funeral service should be made with the minister. In Japan, the deceased person is bathed and dressed in white cotton clothes, and a scroll or piece of paper containing the six Chinese characters – *Namo Amida Butsu* – is placed on his or her chest. These six Chinese characters are called “embracing nembutsu”. After the deceased person is placed in the casket, a short service is conducted which consists of *Okange*, the nembutsu and eko.

At this time, the butsudān is decorated in white (cloth and flowers). Red colours are avoided. The casket is placed on the side of the butsudān. It is unnecessary to place a rice offering in front of the casket. In Jodo Shinshu, the rice bowl and chopsticks are not placed on the casket. Furthermore, breaking the deceased person’s rice bowl when the casket is wheeled out is an indecent act. The deceased person’s belongings should be distributed to relatives and friends.

### **Okamisori (Confirmation Rite)**

At the time of death, the deceased person receives confirmation if she or he has not done so. In this case, the minister represents the Monshu and a Buddhist name is given. All Buddhist names begin with “shakyu” – representing Shakyamuni Buddha – to show that the deceased has joined the sangha. In Jodo Shinshu, the term kaimyo, meaning one who has completed the Buddhist precepts, is not used. At the Hongwanji, a man’s Buddhist name (*homyo*) is written in the following manner: *homyo-shakyu-Buddhist name*. A woman’s Buddhist name is written as: *homyo-shakyu-ni-Buddhist name*. The homyo tablet also contains the person’s full name, age and date of death. Jodo Shinshu does not use wooden tablets.

### **Ingo (Honorary Buddhist Title)**

The ingo is presented to ministers or persons who serve meritorious deeds in their temples. The ingo is presented directly from Hongwanji or from the Buddhist Churches of Canada.

*Note<sup>1</sup>*: In Jodo Shinshu, no other titles are given.

*Note<sup>2</sup>*: Ingo and homyo should be placed inside the butsudān on either side.

*Note<sup>3</sup>*: When addressing a deceased person after a Buddhist name is given, the homyo or ingo should be used.

*Note<sup>4</sup>*: Confirmation rites in Canada are done at the time of the funeral service.

## Wake Service

The wake service represents the last night that the deceased person spends at home. Usually, family and friends eat a last supper together. Sutras chanted at this time can be short but they should be chanted with sincerity. Traditionally, wake services were conducted throughout the night but if this is not possible, certain times should be set aside for the services.

*Note:* Incense burners should be placed in front of the casket and butsudan.

Food can be provided for people who attend the wake service but the refreshments should be very simple. The casket can be put in place before the service or wheeled in with the procession, consisting of the minister in front and family members behind.

### Traditional Funeral Service Order in Canada

1. Address by chairperson (may be the minister)
2. Brief history of the deceased person
3. *Kisanboge* (chanting in front of casket)
4. Presentation of Buddhist name
5. Minister sits beside butsudan:
  - chants *Sanbujo* and *Shoshinge* with a pause after 8 lines
  - with the start of the 9<sup>th</sup> line, the immediate family, followed by relatives and pall bearers, burn incense
6. Gatha: *Nadame* – verses 1 & 2 (optional)
7. Eulogy given by friends and relatives
8. Dharma talk by minister
9. Gatha: *Nadame* – verses 3 & 4 (optional)
10. Word of thanks by family
11. Closing address and announcements.

After the funeral service, the casket is wheeled out while all persons present repeat the nembutsu.

### Service Order at the Cemetery or Crematorium

1. Strike the bell twice
2. *Sanbujo*
3. *Sanbutsuge*, *Juseige* or *Shoshinge*

Where possible, the participants should chant with the minister.

## Chuin Service (Period of Mourning)

This service is a custom brought from ancient India in which positive wishes are expressed for the deceased. After a person departs from this world, a person's karma enters into the state of *chyyuu* (non-existence) for a maximum of 49 days before taking on another life. During that period, a service is conducted every 7<sup>th</sup> day in memory of the deceased with offerings and well wishes for that person. This

ritual came to Japan as in the form of memorial services conducted on every 7<sup>th</sup> day after the person's death until the 49<sup>th</sup> day. In Jodo Shinshu teachings, at the time of one's death, the deceased person enters the Pure Land and attains Buddhahood through the primal vow of Amida Buddha. Hence it is not necessary to extend merit to be accumulated for the deceased. The purpose of the chuin service is to recall the departed loved one and to hear the dharma on the temporary aspect of life along with the teaching of nembutsu. As nembutsu followers, it is a time to reaffirm our beliefs through proper conduct.

7<sup>th</sup> day services traditionally begin with the first service on the 6<sup>th</sup> day, followed by a service every 7<sup>th</sup> day until the 49<sup>th</sup> day. *Amida Kyo* is chanted during chuin services. On the 49<sup>th</sup> day, the service is conducted with friends and relatives.

### Superstitions Connected with Chuin

1. It is a superstitious belief that the 49 days of service should not extend over 3 months.
2. In some districts, services for deceased women end at 35 days. However, there should be no distinction between men and women.

### Ashes

The ashes can be buried in the cemetery plot or placed in the temple's room or vault for ashes. Some persons request that their ashes be scattered at specific locations. This is perfectly acceptable. Many followers of Shinran Shonin request that their ashes be buried near his gravesite. The local minister can arrange for this type of burial.

### Gravesite

For Jodo Shinshu followers, the headstone can be made of any shape or material. Usually, the headstone is inscribed with *Namo Amida Butsu*, and includes the deceased person's ingo and homyo. If the nembutsu is not inscribed on the headstone, place a *Namo Amida Butsu* inscription on the grave before conducting the service. A short service is conducted when the gravestone has been completed.

### 100<sup>th</sup> Day Service

The same service is conducted on the 100<sup>th</sup> day as on the 49<sup>th</sup> day.

### Memorial Service

In addition to the daily family services, a special memorial service for the deceased person is conducted with the family. It may or may not include a minister. Typically, the special service is conducted on the day before the deceased person's death. At Hongwanji, Shinran Shonin's memorial services are conducted every 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> days with the chanting of *Shoshinge*.

On the day of the memorial service, fresh flowers, rice and offerings should be placed on the butsudan. Candles for these services should be white. The preferred sutras for chanting are *Amida Kyo*, *Sanbutsuge* or *Shoshinge*. Ideally, all members of the family would participate. Services such as these become an

opportunity to hear and properly understand the teachings of Shinran Shonin. It is also recommended that families eat vegetarian meals on this day.

### Annual Memorial Services

The services are conducted as follows:

Anniversary	Year When Service is Conducted
1 <sup>st</sup>	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
7 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>
13 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
17 <sup>th</sup>	16 <sup>th</sup>
25 <sup>th</sup>	24 <sup>th</sup>
33 <sup>rd</sup>	32 <sup>nd</sup>
50 <sup>th</sup>	49 <sup>th</sup>
100 <sup>th</sup>	99 <sup>th</sup>

These services are generally held at the local temple with friends and relatives. If the 3<sup>rd</sup> year service is held at home, the décor of the butsudan should be similar to the 7<sup>th</sup> day service with all decorations in subdued colours. After the 7<sup>th</sup> year service, it is customary to return to ordinary décor using various coloured flowers and uchiskiki.

*Note:* Refrain from using flowers such as roses which have thorns.

## 12.2 Jodo Shinshu Religious Days and Services

We should reflect on the dharma on a daily basis and continually reaffirm our commitment to Buddhist teachings. In order to strengthen our beliefs, we should strive to hear the dharma by attending temple services, receiving confirmation and conducting various religious functions within the home.

While it is sad to see that the observance of various Jodo Shinshu practices are fading, the true meaning of these services and rituals should not be discarded. They should always serve as an opportunity to seek and deepen the true path of nembutsu living.

### *Jodo Shinshu Religious Services*

<i>Service</i>	<i>Date</i>
<b>Shusoye</b> (New Year's Day Service)	January 1
<b>Hoonko</b> (Shinran Shonin's Memorial Service)	January 16 (or closest Sunday)
<b>Nehanye</b> (Nirvana Day)	February 15
<b>Higanye</b> (Spring and Fall Equinox)	Near March 20 and Sept 23
<b>Gotanye</b> (Shinran's Birthday)	May 21
<b>Hanamatsuri</b> (Buddha's Birthday)	April 8
<b>Obon</b> (Memorial Service)	July 15 or August 15
<b>Jodoye</b> (Bodhi Day Service)	December 8
<b>Joyaye</b> (New Year's Eve Service)	December 31

#### *12.2.1 Shusoye (New Year's Day)*

It is said that “*one year's plan begins on January 1*”. In order to confirm our daily lives as nembutsu followers, we should welcome the new year by formally exchanging greetings with the Buddha.

The butsudan and *butsuma* (room where the butsudan is kept) should be thoroughly cleaned and tidied, and decorated with proper offerings and fresh flowers. The service order is as follows: *Shoshinge*, nembutsu and six wasan. After the family service, all family members should attend the new year's service at their local temple.

#### *12.2.2 Hoonko (Shinran Shonin's Memorial)*

Shinran Shonin passed away at noon on January 16, 1262. Thus, services are held at the mother temple for 10 days prior to January 16. Local temples follow this tradition by also conducting Hoonko services. These services however, start in the Fall and occur before the services at the mother temple. When the season for Hoonko arrives, families do a thorough cleaning of the shrine and hang Shinran Shonin's image. Rice cakes made of red beans may be offered in tribute to Shinran Shonin's love of red beans.

The service order for Hoonko is as follows: *Shoshinge*, nembutsu and six wasan, followed by a reading of Rennyō Shonin's epistles and a dharma talk by the minister. Generally, an *otoki* (vegetarian) lunch or dinner is served after the service.

#### *12.2.3 Nehanye (Nirvana Day)*

On this day, we solemnly observe the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha. Although he attained enlightenment and became a Buddha, he was still in his earthly form. This earthly form, subject to birth and death, had to perish but his teachings – which embody the spirit of Buddhahood – are eternal.

#### 12.2.4 Higanye (Spring and Autumn Equinox)

Higan means “*the other shore*” and refers to the realm of enlightenment or the Pure Land. At this time, the weather is neither too warm nor too cold and the days and nights are of equal length. Harmony pervades throughout the universe. Buddhists gather before the sacred shrine of Amida Buddha to meditate on the harmony of nature and devote themselves to realizing this harmony within. Suggested sutras are *Juseige* or *Sanbutsuge*. In Japan, it is customary to visit the family temple, followed by a visit to the family gravesite.

#### 12.2.5 Gotanye (Birth of Shinran Shonin)

Gotanye is celebrated on May 21 to commemorate the birth of the founder of Jodo Shinshu – Shinran Shonin – on May 21, 1173. Various joyful services and events take place at the mother temple. In the family home, Gotanye may be observed by chanting *Shoshinge*. In Japan, offerings of red and white *mochi* (pounded rice cakes) may be placed on the shrine to symbolize joyfulness.

#### 12.2.6 Hanamatsuri (Buddha’s Birthday)

The birth of Shakyamuni Buddha is celebrated on April 8<sup>th</sup>. The *Hanamido* (flower shrine) is decorated with beautiful flowers and a statue of the infant Buddha is placed in the center. This shrine reminds us of the flower garden of Lumbini where the Buddha was born more than 2500 years ago.

#### 12.2.7 Obon (Memorial Service)

Obon, which is observed on either July 15<sup>th</sup> or August 15<sup>th</sup>, is a Buddhist memorial service for the deceased. It is an occasion to remember our ancestors and loved ones who have departed this world of impermanence, and to offer thanksgiving for their efforts. Gravesite services are generally conducted as well as a short service at the temple.

In the past, Jodo Shinshu did not observe Obon. In its place, Hoonko was observed. In recent years however, due to greater interest in other sects of Buddhism, Jodo Shinshu followers have also started to observe Obon.

#### 12.2.8 Jodaye (Bodhi Day)

At the age of 35, while meditating under the bodhi tree, Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and became Sakyamuni Buddha. By his example, the Buddha showed us that it was possible for anyone to become a Buddha – a fully enlightened person. We commemorate this very special event on Bodhi Day.

#### 12.2.9 Joyaye (New Year’s Eve Service)

On the eve of December 31<sup>st</sup>, families gather in front of the butsudan to reflect on events of the past and prepare for the new year. It is a time to clean and tidy the butsudan and offer fresh flowers. *Shoshinge* is chanted at this service.

## **13 IMPORTANT BUDDHIST OBSERVANCES FOR INDIVIDUAL LIFE**

### **13.1 Tri Ratna Service (Infant Presentation Service)**

Babies are taken to the temple near the 100<sup>th</sup> day of their births to attend their first Buddhist service, called *Tri Ratna*. It is the sincere and devout wish of the parents that their baby grows happily and healthily as a child of the Buddha. At this service, we express gratitude that a child has come into this world and wish for the child to be raised as a mature, responsible person under the guidance of the Buddha Dharma. Arrangements for the Tri Ratna can be made with the local minister.

### **13.2 Kikyoshiki (Confirmation)**

The Monshu or his representative (in Canada, the Bishop) conducts this ceremony to formally confirm a person as a follower of Jodo Shinshu teachings. It is at this ceremony that Buddhist names (*homyo*) are presented to individuals. In Japan, this ceremony is conducted daily at the mother temple.

### **13.3 Weddings**

It is a very meaningful practice to exchange wedding vows in front of a Buddhist shrine. Arrangements can be made with the local minister.

### **13.4 Silver and Gold Wedding Anniversaries**

These wonderful occasions should be celebrated by visiting the temple with friends and relatives to express gratitude and joy before the celebrations begin.

### **13.5 Purchase of Butsudan**

When we move into a new home, it is advisable to purchase a butsudan as a symbol of our spiritual heritage. The initiation service should be conducted with a minister in attendance. Arrangements can be made with the local minister.

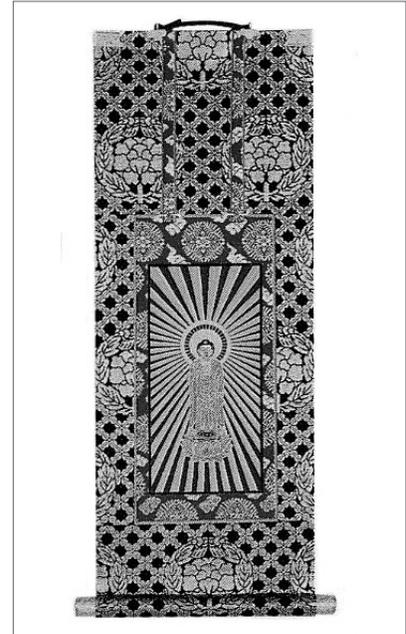
## 14 APPENDIX - SHRINE ADORNMENTS



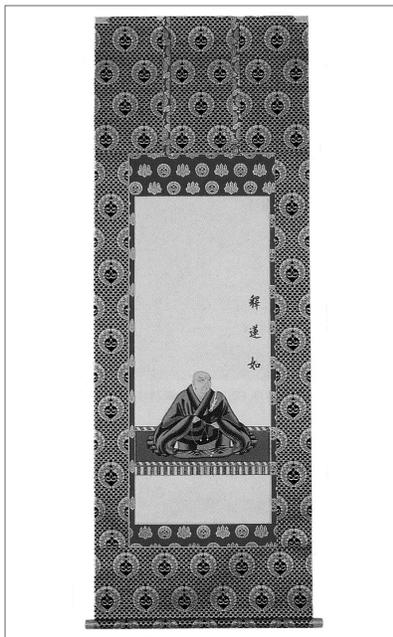
*Amida Buddha statue (Gohonzon), carved aureole (kohai), and stand for the statue (daiza)*



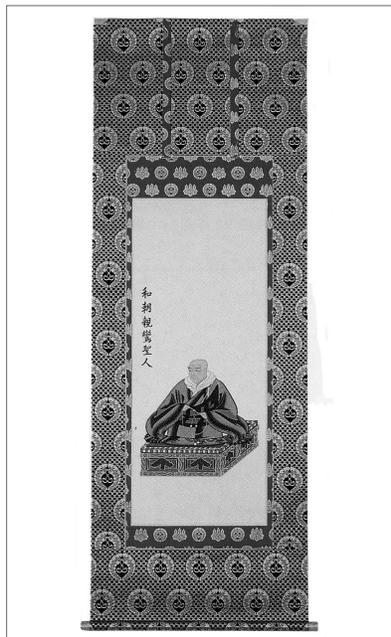
*Canopy for Amida Buddha (buttengai)*



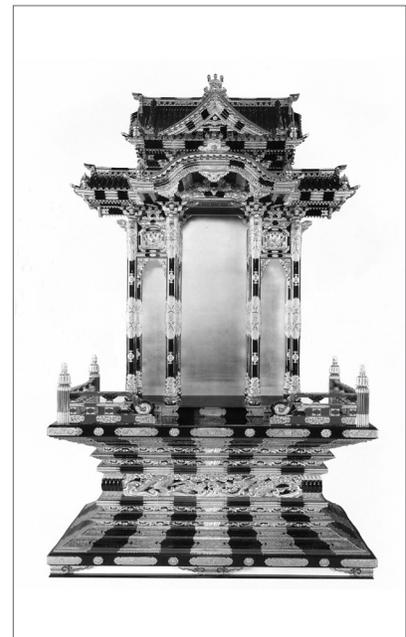
*Image of Amida Buddha*



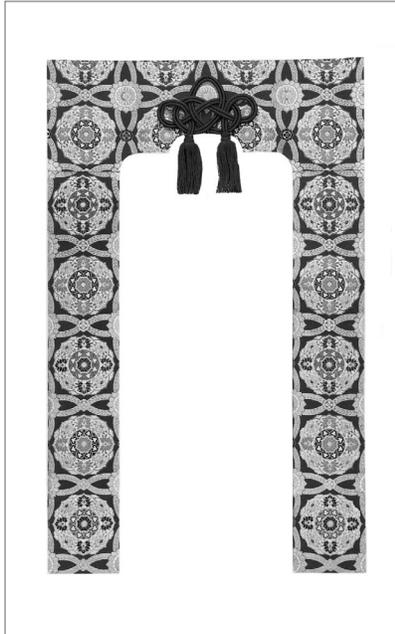
*Scroll on left side (image of Rennyō Shōnin or Namo kukashigiko nyorai) (wakigake)*



*Scroll on right side (image of Shinran Shōnin or Kimyō jinjippo mugeko nyorai) (wakigake)*



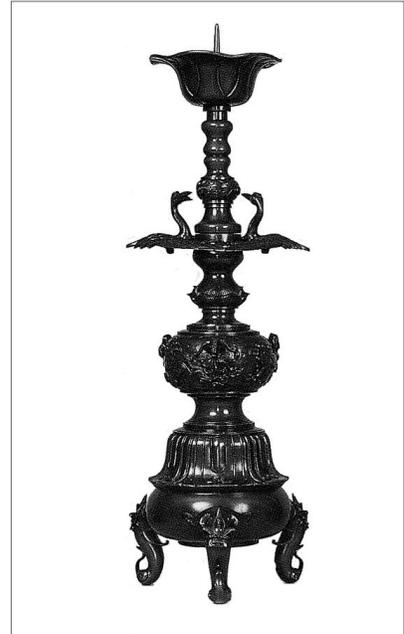
*Shrine (kuden), railing (koran) and Sumeru stand (shumidan)*



*Curtain (tocho)*



*Stand inside of shrine (uwajoku)*



*Candle stand (shokudai)*



*Incense burner (kasha)*



*Flower vase (kabin)*



*Container for rice offering  
(guhandai)*



*Stand in front of shrine (maejoku)*



*Clay incense burner (dogouro)*



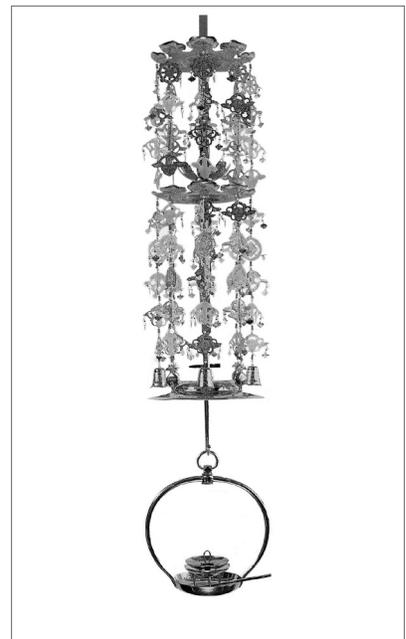
*Stand for incense burner (korodai)*



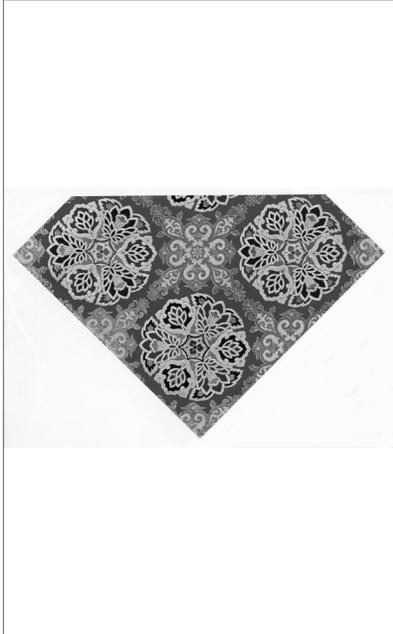
*Circular lantern (rinto)*



*Metal lanterns (kanedoro)*



*Hanging decoration (originally produced music) (hotaku)*



*Decorative cloth to cover maejoku and uwajoku (uchishiki)*



*Stands to place offerings (kuge)*



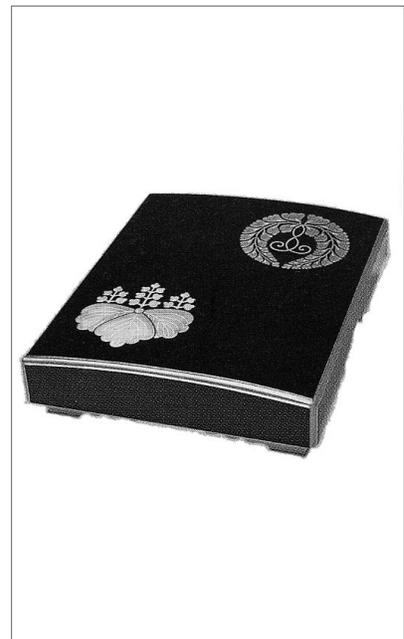
*Stands to place offerings (danmorigu)*



*Bell (rin), pillow for bell or gong (rin futon), stand for bell or gong (rindai), mallet to hit rin (bachu)*



*Box for wasan (wasan bako) and stand for wasan box (wasan joku)*



*Container for Rennyo Shonin's epistles (gobunsho)*



*Container for incense powder (kogo)*

## 15 GLOSSARY

abhidharma	Collection of commentaries by later Buddhist scholars on the sutras and vinaya.
Amida Buddha	Buddha of Infinite Light (also called Amitabha)
bhikshu	Buddhist monk
bhikshuni	Buddhist nun
Bodhisattva Darmakara	Originally a king, Dharmakara made 48 vows for the benefit of all beings. He attained Buddhahood and was named Amida Buddha.
eko	Transmitting the merit of the Primal Vow to others so that they may attain enlightenment
four marks of the dharma	Four marks are impermanence, non-ego or non-self, suffering, and peace and tranquility
Genshin	Sixth of the 7 patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu. He taught that the best way to enter the Pure Land was to practice the nembutsu exclusively.
gokoraku	Ultimate joy
Hinayana	First school of Buddhism
Honen	Last of the 7 patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu. He established Jodo Shinshu and named the 18 <sup>th</sup> vow of the <i>Larger Sukhavativiyuha Sutra</i> to be the most important one.
Jodo Shinshu	Branch of Pure Land Buddhism founded by Shinran Shonin. Also known as Shin Buddhism.
jogyozanmai	One of the four meditative practices in the Tendai sect. It consists of walking around the statue of Amida Buddha for 90 days without rest while contemplating him and chanting the nembutsu.
Larger Sukhavati Viyuha Sutra	One of the three major sutras of Jodo Shinshu. It tells the story of Dharmakara who becomes Amida Buddha.
Mahayana	Second school of Buddhism
Maitreya	Bodhisattva who will become the future Buddha
Meditation Sutra	One of the three major sutras of Jodo Shinshu. In it, the Buddha teaches that we will enter the Pure Land through the practice of the nembutsu.
Middle Way	The path of moderation that avoids the extremes of pleasure or asceticism.
Monshu	Spiritual leader of Hongwanji sect of Jodo Shinshu
Mt. Hiei	Location of the Tendai school of Buddhism. Shinran Shonin was ordained as a Tendai monk at age 9.
Nagarjuna	First of the 7 patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu. Known for teaching sunyata or emptiness
Nembutsu	Literally, <i>Homage to Amida Buddha</i> . The recitation of Amida's name: <i>Namo Amitabha</i> or <i>Namo Amida Butsu</i> .
Noble Path	Middle Way, also called the Eightfold Path

ojo	Rebirth
parinirvana	Entering into the state of enlightenment
Prajnaparamitra Sutra	Collection of teachings on the perfection of wisdom
Pratitya-samutpada	Dependent origination, the belief that everything is created and destroyed through causal relationships
Primal Vow	Basic universal will to walk the path to Buddhahood in order to seek awakening for all beings
Pure Land	Buddha land where all beings can be reborn
Rennyō Shonin	8 <sup>th</sup> Monshu. He wrote approximately 200 letters to followers of Jodo Shinshu teachings; these are still used in services today.
samadhi	State of deep meditation in which the mind becomes temporarily purified.
samsara	Cycle of birth and death
sangha	Community of followers of Buddhism
Shan-tao	Fifth of the 7 patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu. His greatest work is his <i>Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra</i> in which he states that the most important path to the Pure Land is to recite the nembutsu daily.
shila	5 Buddhist precepts for lay followers: no killing, no stealing, no lying, no sexual misconduct, and no intoxicating substances
shinjin	True mind or Buddha mind
Shinran Shonin	Founder of Jodo Shinshu. Lived in Japan from 1173-1262
Shoshinge	<i>Gatha of the True Shinjin</i> . It is chanted daily in front of the family shrine.
Smaller Sukhavati Viyuha Sutra	One of the three major sutras of Jodo Shinshu. In it, the Buddha describes the majestic splendor of the Pure Land.
sunyata	emptiness
sutra	Buddhist teaching
T'an-luan	Third of the 7 patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu. He wrote a detailed commentary on Vasubandhu's <i>Treatise on the Pure Land</i> .
Tannisho	Work containing the sayings of Shinran Shonin. Compiled several decades after his death by a disciple named Yui-en.
T'ao-ch'o	Fourth of the 7 patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu. He taught that the only way to become a Buddha was through the path of the Pure Land.
Tathagata	Buddha
Vasubandhu	Second of the 7 patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu. Following on the teachings of Nagarjuna, he teaches the five ways to be born into the Pure Land.
vinaya	Daily precepts and rules of behaviour followed by monks and nuns









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