

New Year's Message from Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

A Happy New Year to you all! May 2006 bring you happiness and peace, being embraced by the boundless wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha. Instead of giving my new year greeting and message, I would like to quote the message from His Eminence Koshin Ohtani of Hongwanji, Kyoto. This is the message on the Seven-hundred fiftieth year Memorial Service for Shinran Shonin in 2011, which was read by a representative from the Hongwanji, Kyoto, Japan, at the BCA Board meeting which was held in San Francisco on December 9, 2005.

“January 16, 2012 will mark the seven hundred fiftieth anniversary of the passing of our Founder, Shinran Shonin. To commemorate this occasion, the Hongwanji in Kyoto will be conducting the Seven hundred fiftieth Memorial for Shinran Shonin from April 2011 at the Goiedo (Founder's Hall), the restoration work of which will be completed by then. During this opportunity, through reflecting on Shinran Shonin's hardship and achievements, praising his virtue while renewing our resolve, and sincerely receiving the Jodo Shinshu teaching, it is my hope that we will endeavor to widely transmit it as a beacon that guides us all in the contemporary world of confusion and turmoil.

Shinran Shonin was born in 1173, received tokudo ordination at the age of nine, and dedicated himself to his studies and practices of the Buddhist Way on Mount Hiei. However, since he could not find a path that would lead him away from delusion, at the age of twenty-nine, through his experience of seeing Prince Shotoku in a vision, he then encountered Honen Shonin, came to entrust in the Primal Vow, and became a Nembutsu practitioner. At the age of thirty-five, due to persecution of the Nembutsu teachings in 1207, he was exiled to Echigo (present-day Niigata Prefecture). He later moved with his family to Kanto (the area north of present-day Tokyo), and while living amongst the local people, he followed the path of “accepting the Teaching for oneself and sharing it with others.” During his latter years in Kyoto, he devoted himself to completing his major work, *Kyogyoshinsho*, and writing many other works such as the three collections of *wasan* before passing away from this life at the age of ninety and returning to the Pure Land.

According to the Jodo Shinshu teaching established by Shinran Shonin, through the working of Amida Tathagata's Primal Vow, all people can be born in the Pure Land where they immediately attain Buddhahood, then return to this world where they endeavor to guide to the Nembutsu others who are still wandering in delusion. Our birth in the Pure Land us decisively settled the moment we hear and entrust ourselves to the Name, Namo Amida Butsu. Then, with the awareness of our indebtedness and gratitude, we lead our daily lives praising the virtues of the Tathagata by intoning the Nembutsu.

Just as the Buddhist principle of dependent origination shows, all existence, whether animate or inanimate, are closely interconnected and interdependent. On the other hand, human-centered thinking has become quite prevalent today and the pursuit of profit by one segment of the world's population has expanded to extreme proportions, producing inequality that is felt on a global level and jeopardizing the continued existence of not only humanity, but also of various forms of life. Furthermore, in our abruptly changing society, the very foundation of each individual's life seems to be unstable. Being confused by the flow of the world around us, I wonder if we are not forgetting the fact that we ourselves are leading a life of delusion. The life of the Nembutsu is walking the path that leads to birth in the Pure Land, illuminated and embraced by Amida Tathagata's wisdom and compassion, while maintaining respect and support for other. By realizing, through the Tathagata's wisdom, that the source of conflict lies in the self-centeredness of human beings, it is my hope that we will be able to contribute to the building of a world that is free of conflict, where we all can live life to the utmost with joy and contentment.

Our predecessors, even during harsh eras, revered and admired Shinran Shonin, diligently listened to the Dharma, and mutually assisted each other together with the feeling of devotion to the head temple and a determination to protect the Jodo Shinshu teaching. We must accept and maintain this wonderful tradition. However, the present situation of the Hongwanji organization points out that there is an ever-widening gap between our everyday life and the way we propagate the teaching and perform rituals, and it is difficult for lay members to participate in temple activities. Furthermore, there is difficulty in coping with the rapid relocation of the population to the urban areas and the succession of the new generation.

With this occasion of Shinran Shonin's memorial as a great opportunity, the Hongwanji is formulating various long-term plans which deal with widely transmitting the Jodo Shinshu teaching. By taking up and continuing the spirit of the *Monshintokai Undo* (Lay Members' Movement), which was initiated on the occasion of the seven hundredth memorial, and the important *Dobo Undo* (Fellow Practicer Movement), we can build a religious institution that is capable of accommodating modern society. In order to accomplish this, we should cultivate a broad-mind to understand and share the anxieties and feelings of others, create an organization in which we support each other, and transmit the Jodo Shinshu teaching. Likewise, we need to reorganize our institution's framework so that it meets the needs of the times.

Furthermore, in anticipation of the services for Shinran Shonin's memorial, which will be conducted at various temples and locations, I hope the activities by the temple and lay leaders will be well suited to their areas and interaction with the local society will flourish. I especially hope that well-planned, ingenious activities will be promoted in areas where temple activities are not currently being carried out.

On the occasion of the fresh start of our institution's general activities, I heartily look forward to everyone's positive support, cooperation and participation. “

(by SHAKU SOKUNYO, Monshu, Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, dated on January 9, 2005)