

# Life of Awakening



**‘Awakening’** means to realize that nothing lasts forever. If we believe that Amida Buddha made a Vow to bring us to Pure Land to experience eternal joy and happiness with our families and friends, we surely will not become enlightened (a Buddha).

‘Shinjin,’ an important doctrinal concept of Jodo Shinshu is now usually translated as “true entrusting,” implying that a follower should drop all doubts about Amida’s Fundamental Vow [to save all beings who find it impossible or difficult to follow the Eightfold moral path to Enlightenment] and rely entirely on Amida’s Boundless Compassion. However, as we acquire more understanding of the truths of life, we also realize that our impure feelings and self-centered desires have not completely disappeared in spite of this attainment.

At the advanced level of Awakening, ‘shinjin’ is perhaps better understood as “true acceptance.” Although we are unable to rely on a mythical being called Amida Buddha, in its traditional sense, to deliver us from worldly sufferings, we discover that Awakening entails not only an intellectual step forward but also a complete psychological turn-around -- becoming unperturbed by any annoyance or setback, and unconditionally compassionate to all beings. Such a radical change of curbing anger, fear, and craving involves a true and complete acceptance of the truth of impermanence and the inter-relatedness of all that exists. It should be a simple matter of letting go of our tight hold on our unceasing desire for an everlasting happy life. However, it is extremely difficult, because, in addition to genetic tendencies, we are so tightly in bondage to our psychologically conditioned responses to all that we have experienced since birth.

A ‘myokonin,’ who is a simple, uneducated person, can let go with a feeling of joy, believing in the boundless compassion of Amida who will forever protect us from all unpleasant and evil situations and guide us to the Pure Land. Many

“One who wishes to be reborn in Pure Land on hearing it’s a joyful world cannot become a Buddha.”

- Renny Shonin

years ago, Mrs. Chiyono Sasaki of Kona, Hawaii, who had belonged to the former temple of the late Rev. Shonen Tamekuni, joyfully exclaimed:

*Konomama ... I happily bow my head with happiness!*

*Good or bad ... konomama!*

*Right or wrong ... konomama!*

... ..

*Not knowing that Amida calls to me just as I am ... sonomama,*

*I was wandering in the dark.*

... ..

[Freely translated from her Japanese, with omissions.]

The noted Zen scholar Daisetz Suzuki recognized and appreciated the myokonin’s simple acceptance of Amida’s Compassion by explaining that the concepts of “konomama” (as I am) and “sonomama” (as I am/it is) are equivalent to Shinran’s idea of “jinen honi,” which means that one is naturally or spontaneously led to the Pure Land.

As we graduate from placing our trust on a mythic Benevolent Being to realizing the truths of life as pointed out by the historical Buddha, we should go forward with “konomama” in mind -- not fretting about our lack of spiritual progress -- and remembering that “sonomama,” the understanding of life “as-it-is,” includes the principle of change. We do not have to despair that evil and suffering will always be with us. Living naturally, “konomama,” in harmony with the rest of humanity, with real concern and creative solutions to problems, we can effect a desirable change in the health and living conditions not only within our own homes and immediate surroundings but throughout the world. Our concerted efforts will, thus, set in motion the natural process that transforms our sorrowful world into a joyful Pure Land, which is in essence the state of enlightenment.

*Gassho,*

Kimi Yonemura Hisatsune

*[Some years ago, my husband and I met the wonderfully pious Rev. Tamekuni at the home of his daughter, Yoshie Kyhos, who lives with her now retired husband Professor Don Kyhos in Davis, California, and attends services at the Sacramento Beisuin. Rev. Tamekuni’s granddaughter, Nancy Okumura-Foley, is an active member of Marin Temple in Mill Valley, California]*