

## **The Futaba Memorial Lecture of the Shin Buddhist Homba Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii was given by Dr. Jeff Wilson.**

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### Shin Buddhism: An American Religion

Dr. Jeff Wilson

My talk this morning is titled “From Japanese to American.” I had originally intended to spend the hour talking about the transformations that took place as Jodo Shinshu moved from Japan into Hawaii and the U.S. mainland. After all, I’m a scholar of American Buddhist history and this is a subject that I find quite fascinating. But as the date of the lecture approached, I found that my interests were shifting. To be honest, I think the history of Jodo Shinshu in America has been handled well by other scholars, including Al Bloom and George Tanabe. If you just go to Google and search for “Alfred Bloom Jodo Shinshu in America” you will find a wealth of great materials, including not only expert analyses of the past but also useful suggestions for the future of Shin in America. So I’ve decided not to try and reinvent the wheel here, especially because many of you are familiar with Shin history. Indeed, some of you have lived a lot more of it than I have. There’s no point in flying in a guy all the way from Canada just to tell you about Hawaiian Buddhism, after all. On the other hand, if you really do want me to talk more about American Buddhist history in specifics, just ask during the question period and I’ll be happy to discuss it in detail.

For now, I’m going to focus most of my attention on the question of what it is that Jodo Shinshu offers to America, and how it can be communicated to others. I believe this is the most fruitful way to handle the question of how Shin Buddhism can continue to move from being a Japanese to an American religion, or perhaps

we can even say a universal one. Shin Buddhism is something of a historical anomaly from the standpoint of the overall Buddhist tradition. Usually, Buddhism has been a missionary religion. It spread throughout the hundreds of different cultures of the Indian subcontinent, and from there into the countries of Southeast Asia, into central Asia, into China, Vietnam, Korea, and eventually all the way to Japan, which Shinran referred to as outlying islands scattered in the ocean like grains of millet. Everywhere that Buddhism went, it kept moving on, gathering in more people to the Dharma. But that's not what happened with Jodo Shinshu. Shin Buddhism began in Japan, and for nearly all of its history it stayed there. Now, don't get me wrong: Jodo Shinshu greatly expanded the number of people involved in Buddhism in Japan through its concerted missionary efforts. The efforts of missionaries like Shinran and Rennyo were a big part of what helped to move Buddhism from a religion confined mostly to elites and urban dwellers to one that truly encompassed the whole of the Japanese people. But until the modern age, Jodo Shinshu never attempted to reach beyond the borders of Japan, unlike Buddhism in other countries.

It was only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that Shin Buddhism began to move, hesitantly, into new areas both East and West. Expansion of Jodo Shinshu into other parts of Asia was mainly the result of Japanese military imperialism, with both Honganjis supplying missionaries to Korea, Taiwan, and China, as well as Hokkaido to better integrate it into Japan. Higashi Honganji was especially involved in the Asian colonization efforts, while Nishi Honganji was more involved in ministering to the immigrant Japanese population in the West, but both lineages participated in Asian and Western missionary activities. In other words, for nearly all of its history, Jodo Shinshu was the unusual form of Buddhism that hadn't tried to transcend its cultural boundaries and had no experience of being trans-ethnic (unlike Zen, Theravada, so-called Tibetan Buddhism, and so on), and Jodo Shinshu finally became a world religion in cooperation with the Japanese military machine, attempting to impose Japanese culture and religion on others rather than integrating Shin Buddhism respectfully with the needs of the local populace. Meanwhile, in Hawaii and the American continents Shin Buddhism came along with Japanese immigrants. Here it was not part of a colonial exercise or missionary program to the natives but part of an important survival strategy as Japanese minorities sought community and religious solace in the face of a dominant racist white culture and religion. With no missionary history in the past, an imperialistic face in Asia, and a tight-knit ethnic identity in the West, it's no wonder that Jodo Shinshu never really learned how to master outreach activities. The basic fact is that historically speaking nearly all of Shin Buddhism's efforts have been confined to ministering to people of Japanese ancestry, regardless of

their actual location, with little systematic attempt to develop the adaptations and strategies necessary to expand beyond this original group.

Among both scholars and the general public there are people who heap a lot of blame on Jodo Shinshu in America for allegedly remaining Japanese and failing to become American. I, frankly, am not one of them. As I look at the historical record, what I see is that over the course of several generations, Shin Buddhism in fact *did* evolve from a Japanese religion practiced in America into an American religion, albeit one with strong cultural ties to Japan. Just compare how Jodo Shinshu operates in Japan with how it operates in the USA, and you'll quickly realize that American Shin Buddhism departs in some significant ways from Japanese Shin; the two are definitely not identical, even though they are of course versions of the same religion. For example, unlike in Japan, American temples meet on Sunday mornings, they have weekly Dharma talks, their ministers are employees rather than inheriting the temple from their families, we use new hymns written in English, and so on. Forces of both innovation and conservatism helped to bring about this transformation from Japanese to American, which nurtured tens of thousands of American Buddhists in a form of Shin that was a hybrid of Japanese and American practices and attitudes and was a pretty good fit for its time and place.

From my perspective as a scholar of American religion, I consider Jodo Shinshu to be a clear success story. Many other religious groups face far fewer obstacles and yet never manage to achieve anything like the network of temples and multi-generational tradition that we have inherited from the Issei, Nisei, and those who came after them. I can't help but be impressed. If we were laying odds back at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the smart money would have said that Shin Buddhism would last no more than a generation or so, that the Japanese in America would become entirely Christianized, and that it would be such a footnote to American religious history as not to merit even the most cursory scholarly attention. But that's not what happened. And so, if Jodo Shinshu's process of Americanization has been slow or incomplete, I have to ask myself, what more would I have expected? What more could I have asked of a group in its position?

However, that is not the only perspective that I have on the subject. In addition to being a supposedly disinterested historian, I also happen to be a committed Jodo Shinshu follower myself. I didn't grow up in this tradition, but at this point I've been involved with Shin Buddhism for nearly my entire adult life. It is fair to say that it has probably been the single greatest influence on my development into the person I am today. It shapes my fundamental approach to life and many of my regular activities; it helped put me on the path to my present

career and informs everything from my family life to my recreational activities. And as an insider, I have to admit to some concern and disappointment. Jodo Shinshu has been successful in the past, but its glory days seem to be behind it. The membership numbers of the main institutions such as the Buddhist Churches of America have been shrinking for decades now. As Buddhism has exploded into the wider American consciousness our own denomination seems to have receded ever more into the shadows. Although we can point to some excellent developments in American Shin Buddhism—such as the Pacific Buddhist Academy and the BCA’s Jodo Shinshu Center—and there are many people working hard to revitalize Jodo Shinshu, I still sometimes worry whether our efforts are too little too late. Our pace of change is slow, perhaps too slow to keep up with today’s fast-paced, globalized America.

Today, it seems incontrovertible that Shin Buddhism has fallen behind the times: it remains a form of Buddhism adapted to a 20<sup>th</sup> century America that is rapidly passing into history. In 2010, Shin Buddhism confronts a very different world than when the Issei and Nisei first struggled to find a niche in America. Not only are America and the international scene far different, but the reality of American Buddhism has changed as well. Today America is far more secularized, ethnically diverse, educated, and leisure-oriented than a century ago. Racism is hardly dead but it is nowhere near the force it once was. And American Buddhism has blossomed into thousands of different groups across the country pursuing a multiplicity of forms of dharma. Most of these are newer arrivals than Shin Buddhism, and have worked vigorously to adapt to more recent trends in American culture and spirituality. They have captured the attention of the media in a way that Jodo Shinshu has never even really attempted to do, and it is the convert meditation-oriented lineages that, despite their minority status within American Buddhism, actively define what Buddhism is for the American public. Meanwhile, Jodo Shinshu has remained in patterns established during an earlier America that provided relevancy at the time but are probably no longer appropriate.

My research on American Shin Buddhism has identified a number of challenges that confront Jodo Shinshu today. There are probably few surprises in this list. First we have the shrinking number of Japanese-Americans involved in Jodo Shinshu. The simple truth is that the Japanese-American population of the United States is highly diverse and, except for a relatively small contingent of recent immigrants, it is completely acculturated. Unlike in former times, today there is no necessity for Japanese-Americans to rely on Shin Buddhism to provide ethnic protection or cultural connections. If Shin Buddhism remains tied as tightly as it still is to Japanese-American culture and community, then it will continue to diminish as this group shrinks and blends with the mainstream, and it will

eventually go extinct. The demographic handwriting is on the wall and there simply isn't anything we can do to avoid it. Barring something like a wholesale war with North Korea or China that sends hundreds of thousands of Japanese refugees to the West, we simply aren't going to go back to the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century phase of relative numerical strength. And I don't think anyone wants *that* to be our solution to Shin's future in America!

A second, related challenge is the financial strain facing many temples. Much of this is related to the decreasing size of the Japanese-American population compared to the overall population, as well as demographic shifts that have moved people away from temples in smaller and rural communities. This is a serious issue and there is no magic solution to take care of our financial troubles. To some extent this can be helped by bringing in new people to the temples, but at the same time it's a fact that overall many non-Japanese-Americans have proven to be poor donors. Some of this is due to the arcane system of *orei* and related practices that baffle newcomers and prevent them from knowing when and how much they should be contributing. But some of it seems to be a widespread failure to value the tradition to the extent of making financial sacrifices for its sake.

Another challenge related to these factors is the widespread perception of Jodo Shinshu as a Japanese-American ethnic fortress, rather than an open religion. Many people look at the BCA and the Hawaii Mission and assume it is for Japanese-Americans only. This has not at all been my own experience. My family and I have been welcomed in every temple community that we have had the privilege to live near, and no one has ever made any trouble over the fact that we are white. But other people who look at Jodo Shinshu do tend to believe that it is an exclusive club, and I've heard stories of temples that are run that way. It seems that we have to do more than simply open the doors up and say that anyone who wants to come in is welcome, since that message isn't getting through. We need to actually go out and invite folks in. And we have to mean it.

All of this brings us to the final major challenge that we face, and the one that I want to spend most of this morning addressing. It is our lack of mission-mindedness and a sense of true inclusivity. When I think about what troubles me about Jodo Shinshu's situation in America, I find that my disappointment is not really due to membership numbers or money problems. What I find most troubling is that same centuries-old lack of effectively bringing our message to others. In this way, we have failed to live up to Shinran's vision. We have a tendency to treat Jodo Shinshu as just another form of Japanese Buddhism. When we do so, we lose sight of the fact that Shin Buddhism was in fact a whole scale revolution *against* Japanese Buddhism. It stands out among both the Japanese religions and among

the forms of Buddhism. In order to move forward toward a brighter American Shin future, I believe we need to become clearly aware of the excellence of Shinran's radical departure from mainstream Japanese Buddhism and emphasize his teaching's distinctive qualities both to ourselves and to the outside world.

Therefore, for this session I am wearing both my scholar's hat and my practitioner's one so that we can tackle a pressing question: What does Shin Buddhism potentially offer America that other Buddhisms may not? After all, if we are just another minor flavor of the Dharma, then it frankly doesn't matter very much if we pass our traditions on to the next generations. In that case, our passing will not deprive the world of anything of great importance, and perhaps we would all be better served by giving our support to some other, more robust form of Buddhism that is more likely to maintain a strong presence on the American scene. On the other hand, if I am correct and there is something rare and wonderful about Jodo Shinshu, then its preservation and enhancement can motivate us to find new ways to maximize its potential and deliver it to younger generations of Japanese-Americans, to Buddhists of mixed ethnic heritage, and to the wider America that has rarely been involved in Shin Buddhism.

When I read Shinran and reflect on the story of his life, I see a man who was not seeking to save the Japanese. He was not trying to set up an ethnic institution to nurture future immigrants in a racist American society. He was not practicing Buddhism-as-usual, with its deference to the state and rigid hierarchies between the monastic elite and the dependent masses. Shinran's writings abound with the bodhisattva spirit to save all people and the determination to offer a truly inclusive method that could be practiced by all, no matter where or of what station. He was Japanese and lived in Japan, so of course that is where he carried out his work. But there is not a whiff of Japanese chauvinism or pride, nor suspicion or hard feelings toward those outside Japan. He only always seeks to open the treasure-house of the Dharma as wide as possible in order to show everyone that they too are embraced by the light of great compassion. Therefore, if we are to remain true to the founder's vision, we have to consider how Shin Buddhism can complete its evolution from ethnic sect into universal religion and fulfill Shinran's own vision that the Primal Vow embraces *all* people. To me, these two questions are intimately tied to one another. Identifying what Shin Buddhism offers to America and helping it progress from ethnic to universal religion are both part of faithfully carrying Shinran's vision forward and ensuring its survival and expansion in the West.

So let's talk about how to rest Jodo Shinshu on a widely inclusive vision, rather than a narrowly ethnic or cultural one. The Shin philosopher Kaneko Daiei

may be known to some of you. Kaneko was a professor at Otani University and disciple of Kiyozawa Manshi. He was highly critical of how materialistic Higashi Honganji had become, and was excommunicated for ten years before being reinstated. Occasionally in his writings Kaneko used the term inner togetherness, by which he meant the natural bonds that we share with other beings. There is an emotional quality to this feeling of “fellowness” with others, so that when someone else is suffering, we too suffer. Troubled by the suffering of ourselves and others, we look to see what its cause is. We look at the real situations of actual people in their everyday lives, rather than focusing on the ideal of how we *ought* to be in order to avoid suffering. This is very much a Shin path, as it looks to ordinary beings instead of monastic ideals. There is a poem by the monk Ryokan that expresses this very well: "When I think about the misery of those in this world, their sadness becomes mine. Oh, that my monk's robe were wide enough to gather up all the suffering people in this floating world. Nothing makes me more happy than Amida Buddha's vow to save everyone." Kaneko goes on to indicate that in realizing that we and others are fellow beings bonded by an inseparable inner togetherness, we seek a solution to our misery that will be adequate for all. The answer, according to Kaneko, is the Primal Vow, which embraces all beings just as they are, and provides the nembutsu as the easy practice that anyone can perform.

This is about as far as Kaneko took his idea. I want to expand on the trail that he pointed out, fleshing out this concept of inner togetherness. To me, it is emblematic of what is greatest about Shin Buddhism and is one of the resources that we can use to expand Jodo Shinshu and make it more relevant in America. As I understand it, inner togetherness arises from the fact of inter-relatedness. Inter-relatedness or interdependence is the central insight of Mahayana Buddhism. It means that nothing exists separate from all the other things in the universe. Every person lives only because they rely on the support of others. No matter how far out you trace the web of relations, there is always more that can be said about it: it is infinite and total, and only a buddha can truly perceive its full extent. Indeed, in the Mahayana tradition it is often said that comprehension of this totality is what provokes buddhahood or is buddhahood itself. Thus while I seem in my deluded mind to be one individual person struggling in the world against others, in fact from the Buddha's viewpoint there is no separation between self and other. In traditional language this is often called emptiness, because we are empty of independent existence. But inner togetherness is a uniquely Shin term for this understanding, which stresses the positive side of connection and the fellowship aspect, without losing sight of the inseparable inter-relatedness that informs the basic concept.

So, there is no separation between self and other, and my life only exists because of others. It is the power of others, the power-beyond-myself, that sustains my entire existence. We say there is no-self, but another way to express it would be that when you have a near death experience, the entire history of the universe ought to flash before your eyes. This vision is embedded in Shin within the story of Amida's Pure Land. In Pure Land Buddhism we say that we wish to be born together with all beings in the Pure Land, so again we see the emphasis on togetherness. We seek a common destination that will be acceptable to all people. In this life, we have separations and disputes with other people based on our deluded egos: this is a fact of living that we cannot fully overcome. Actually, there are forms of Buddhism that attempt to transform this world into a literal Pure Land. That is a noble goal and I strongly support all efforts to improve the human condition and preserve the natural environment, but realistically samsara is never going to be entirely free of suffering. The story of the Pure Land upholds our greatest values: that even though we are imperfect, we are embraced by great compassion, and even though we are unable to get along now, our goal is total reconciliation and togetherness.

Shinran expressed this well in the Tannisho, when he contrasted the Pure Land path with that of the sages. He said that the path of sages is to have pity and look down on other beings. Sages are great Buddhist saints who by their own efforts have achieved freedom. But because they have separated themselves to reach freedom, they cannot feel the pains of ordinary beings: they look down with pity upon the rest of us. The path of the Pure Land, by contrast, is to be born together with other beings into nirvana, the Pure Land, and then to immediately return to help others forever and ever. This Pure Land type of compassion keeps the practitioner in constant relationship to others, not separating him into a saint. If you become a saint, you are different from suffering beings and can no longer relate. Thus from Shinran's perspective the arrogance of the saint represents a type of failure.

Let me give an example of this sort of Pure Land compassion. There is a story in the Kudensho, the Notes on Oral Teachings of Shinran. This is not exactly an official document of Honganji, and it may not be accurate, but it does reflect Shinran's spirit well. In it, Shinran said that if someone loses a loved one and comes to you in distress, you should not get on your high horse. Instead, Shinran said that you should briefly teach them the Dharma, then get them drunk. So you drink with them, and when they can smile and forget their pain for a little while, you leave them be. Now, I don't know if this is the best answer or not, and like I said the story may not be true, but it points to the feeling of Shin. You don't deliver some sort of abstract lesson about how all things arise and pass away and

so people should not be attached to anything: you just get right down there with the suffering person and share in their sorrow, drinking together and cheering them through your companionship. This is acting out of the recognition of inner togetherness, a recognition that brings you toward others rather than removing you from the everyday world.

In exploring this subject, we need to emphasize that being born with all beings is an attitude that is quintessentially Mahayana in orientation. The Pure Land is an expression of compassion, not selfishness. We seek the Pure Land because it is the place where we can be reconciled with everyone, not merely for our own individual liberation. There is no such thing as individual liberation: like Amida, who vowed never to achieve buddhahood unless all beings would be liberated through the power of the nembutsu, we cannot achieve Buddhahood unless all others are included in it.

I find there is thus an emotional quality to the path of enlightenment in Jodo Shinshu that is very interesting. Shinran points to this heart feeling when he wrote to a follower in one of his letters that: “Signs of long years of saying the nembutsu and aspiring for birth can be seen in the change in the heart that had been bad and in the deep warmth for friends and fellow-practitioners.” Deep warmth for others is the sign of nembutsu coming to fruition in one’s life, *not* detachment. There is a story about Shoma, one of the wondrous happy persons known as myokonin, which illustrates this well. Shoma walks into a temple and lays down in the altar area. Everyone is shocked and they demand to know why Shoma feels able to be so disrespectful. But Shoma replies that Amida is his loving parent and that he is like a silly child. He feels completely at home in the temple, as if he were in his own home. For a deeply awakened ordinary person like Shoma, there is an emotional warmth to his trusting, and there is no separation between the foolish being and Amida.

Inner togetherness is also a vision of totalness: all beings will be born together, all are embraced. In the Kyogyoshinsho Shinran quotes the Nirvana Sutra as follows: “All sentient beings without fail ultimately realize great shinjin.” This vision of Shinran’s was so expansive that elsewhere in the Kyogyoshinsho Shinran says that 10 billion maras (these are the Buddhist equivalents of devils) were liberated when the Moon Matrix Sutra was preached, and that in the Sun Matrix Sutra the king mara (i.e. Satan himself) was converted to Buddhism and worshipped the Buddha. That’s an incredible concept. No other religion says that even the devil will become a buddha or saint. If even Mara will be liberated, that means that all beings, even those we hate, will be freed. And it means that even the aspects of ourselves that we hate the most will nonetheless be released in the

end. Shinran doesn't even stop there, however. In *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*, Shinran proclaims that "This Tathagatha pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood."

When so much effort is spent in other religions dividing the world into the saved and the damned and proclaiming how other people are justifiable objects of our suspicion and even hate, this is an amazing, radical teaching. It can also be an uncomfortable one, because we are so used to having our prejudices confirmed for ourselves. If you take a moment to think of two or three people you dislike, you'll see what I mean. Perhaps it's a co-worker, or a politician, or a neighbor, or even a family member. Well, the Shin teaching says that that person is valued just as much as you, and they too are destined for the Pure Land. You can't get away from them. I heard a story once about an Issei man who had a hard life. He suffered from the discrimination of the white community, and he was justifiably angry. He heard the Shin minister say that Amida embraced all people, and that really alarmed him. He demanded to know if hakujin could go to the Pure Land too. Hakujin is a term for a white person, for those who aren't familiar with it. I believe the term out here in Hawaii is haole. The minister said yes, the Pure Land is full of hakujin and all other sorts of people. The Issei man was so upset that he quit Jodo Shinshu and became a Zen Buddhist! He didn't want to go to the same Pure Land as haole. But if I can paraphrase the Tannisho, even a Japanese-American goes to the Pure Land, so of course haole do.

Inner togetherness is a religious concept that I think our modern minds can easily understand if they are introduced to it in the proper fashion. This is true whether someone is Buddhist or not. Contemporary ecological science has made us aware of how inter-related we are with all things in our environment, even bugs and plants that we initially consider to be pests. Today we have concepts like symbiosis that point out how living things rely on one another. Scientists have even discovered that some of the organelles within our own cells are actually derived from single-cell organisms that we formed symbiotic relationships with in the distant past. The mitochondria, the organelles that basically generate the energy through which we sustain our lives, actually retain their own DNA still. They are in every cell in our body and it is impossible to categorize them as either part of ourselves or as separate from ourselves. Here I am not trying to assert that Buddhism somehow predicted the science of ecology or the theory of endosymbiosis. Rather, I'm pointing out one of the ways that Buddhism seems to converge nicely with concepts that we are already familiar with, and that therefore we can use to help explain Buddhism to others.

When we awaken to our togetherness with and reliance upon others, it gives rise to gratitude. And gratitude, in the Shin tradition, is expressed through nembutsu. I'll have more to say on this topic this afternoon. For now, I just want to point to how Shin theory usually involves an emotional expression rather than just dry assent to beliefs and doctrines. We are at our best when we are moved by the Dharma, and that emotional feeling of inner togetherness with others can help us to expand the circle to encompass all of American society, and beyond, in our vision for how Jodo Shinshu can contribute to America. Rennyō's biography is a good source for ideas that fit up with what I've been saying. Here are some quotes that are attributed to Rennyō:

“Since, from dawn to dusk, everything is provided for us by Amida, we should deeply acknowledge these divine provisions.”

“Even when I drink water from the well, it is through the working of the Buddha-Dharma. I understand that I owe even a mouthful of water to the working of the Tathagata.”

“When I take meals, I never forget the benevolence of the Tathagata. With every mouthful, I am reminded of this benevolence.”

“I eat and dress myself through the benevolence of the Tathagata.”

“What is there that is not the Buddha's gift?”

I especially like that last line: What is there that is not the Buddha's gift? That is a very humble and inspiring way to approach life, I believe. At any rate, all morning I have been trying to indicate that there is a universal vision embedded in the culturally-specific matrix of Shin Buddhism, that it goes back all the way to Shinran, and that it is a resource that we can bring forward in order to help us widen our vision for Jodo Shinshu and make it more inclusive, something that we must do if Shin Buddhism is to survive in America. I want to close this morning's talk by discussing briefly a few of the practical implications of all of this.

It seems to me that once we have decided to have a universal vision for Shin Buddhism, we have to start sharing it with others outside our community. And frankly, transmitting Shin ideas to non-Shin Buddhists is something we have done a poor job of so far. I'm genuinely impressed by how Shin Buddhists have built up a network for self-education. We have our own seminars, our own Dharma schools, our own newsletters and publishing operations, and so on. But in all of this, we are mainly only always talking to ourselves. The truth is, we mostly produce Shinshu materials for our own consumption. If we're going to grow as a

religion, we're going to have to make a concerted effort *not* to just talk to each other all the time. We need to be looking at new forms of media that reach much wider audiences, such as YouTube videos and other online forums. And we need to be engaging with media outlets that we haven't effectively utilized so far. I know that Dr. Bloom writes for local newspapers, and I think you have some Buddhist radio programs and maybe even television out here in Hawaii, is that right? That's a great start, and it can be vastly improved upon. If you go to Barnes and Noble, how many Zen or Tibetan books do you see? And how many Jodo Shinshu ones do you find? It's not because we haven't published dozens and dozens of Shin books in English. But we almost always publish them in-house, with Buddhist Study Center Press or Nembutsu Press or something similar. These simply cannot reach a significantly wider audience than ourselves. Dr. Bloom again points the way, since he's done some publishing with World Wisdom Press. But we can go farther. I intentionally published *Buddhism of the Heart* with Wisdom Publications because they had never done anything Pure Land before and they have market reach that enables them to get books onto mainstream bookstore shelves. Working with the editors there forced me to learn how to articulate Jodo Shinshu to non-Shin Buddhists, and gave me the opportunity to reach a substantial audience. And the substantial feedback that I have received, including from many who had never encountered Shin Buddhism before, indicates that this is an unrecognized thirst for these sort of teachings out there in America, if we can only make our approach to the Dharma known. Likewise, I have submitted many ideas to *Tricycle* magazine, and managed to get several major articles on Pure Land Buddhism published there, where their quarter million readership contains very few Shin Buddhists.

I'm not saying we all need to go out and write books for HarperCollins or St. Martin's Press. What I mean is that we need to be always on the lookout for ways in which we can choose to engage with the non-Shinshu community, rather than reflexively talking to ourselves. Jodo Shinshu can't become more universal and open until we demonstrate to others that we really want them to be included, and that even if they don't feel like joining up with us, we have a message and a vision that they can benefit from hearing. My impression is that we only invite reporters to our temples when we're going to put on a fundraiser or Obon odori, and so of course they always portray Shin temples primarily in terms of Japanese culture rather than as a religion relevant to everyone. Also, we almost always hold our public events at temples, and, except for fundraisers, we don't design them to reach a non-Shinshu audience or market them to non-Buddhists. What if we were to regularly rent community centers—by which I mean places that aren't temples and aren't associated with Buddhism—and hold open lectures aimed at the non-

Buddhist public? Learning how to articulate our message to outsiders will have the additional benefit of helping us identify what we ourselves value about the tradition. This is something I'm going to talk more about in the afternoon.

I could go on in this way, but I'd like to hear what Dr. Tanabe has to say, and what everyone here has to add. So let me finish for now. This afternoon I'm planning to move on to talk about some of the specific aspects of the Jodo Shinshu way of religion that I think America can benefit from, and that which therefore we need to highlight and develop a vocabulary around that will allow us to convey the value of our tradition to others.

This morning, I talked about how Shin Buddhism can be moved toward a more inclusive vision. As I stressed, there are rich resources within the tradition itself that can be brought forward to cultivate a more open, all-embracing ideal, and I believe that this would not only be useful for the survival and growth of Jodo Shinshu in America, but in my opinion is actually an important way to remain true to the bodhisattva vision of Shinran. In short, I feel he would have been disappointed with our failure to make the religion founded in his name into a truly universal path that actively includes people of all types.

I also indicated that we should be thinking about what is distinctive and valuable about Jodo Shinshu, that is to say, what Shin offers to America that one may not be able to always find in other religions or even other forms of Buddhism.

Of course, this necessitates that we think deeply about what the qualities of Shin Buddhism are and look for ways to articulate them to people who have no familiarity with the foreign terms and unusual concepts that we employ. We can try to be as open and inclusive as possible, but if we can't communicate what it is about Shinshu that we think others should pay attention to, then it will all be for naught. So my talk this afternoon is titled "Shin Buddhism in Contemporary America" and I'm going to stress four specific themes that we can keep in mind as we interact with non-Shinshuists and try to express our tradition to them. These themes are relaxing, trusting, thanking, and fearlessness. Relaxing means an emphasis on being who we are, and on naturalness instead of striving. Trusting means cultivating a vision of our inner togetherness and turning toward power beyond the self. Thanking means living an expressive Buddhist life of gratitude that puts our inner feelings into action in the world. And fearlessness means focusing on Shin's function as a religion without anxiety, which provides hope and courage in a difficult world.

I'll start by talking about the first three keywords we can use to help others understand Shin Buddhism. They are relax, trust, and thank. Please note that these are verbs, actions, not beliefs. There is a tendency to over-emphasize the so-called theological side of Jodo Shinshu when explaining it to others. Beliefs are not unimportant, of course, but one of the common observations is that Buddhism is more about actions, practices, rather than doctrines and dogmas. When we talk about Shin Buddhism, we can help others to understand it by focusing on what it is that we do.

First up on my list is relaxing. Just as we are, we are embraced by boundless compassion. This means that in distinction from other forms of Buddhism, Shin values naturalness rather than striving to become or pretend to be something we are not, especially because such efforts are so often ego-based. Most religions ask you to be something other than who and what you are. They want you to become holy or pure or good enough to qualify to enter Heaven or achieve Buddhahood or whatever ultimate goal it is that they hold out in front of the believer. We live in a predominantly Christian country, so we're all aware that many Christians teach people that they have to stop sinning or they will roast in Hell for eternity. Even kids on the playground used to tell me that I was damned because I hadn't accepted Jesus Christ as my personal savior, and that my damnation and never-ending physical torture were entirely justified due to my own faults.

There's just one big problem to this common approach to religion: we are not in fact really all that good. We may try, but life is hard and we are weak, and few people can measure up to the standards set by religion. Worse yet, if we do

manage to make some progress, it itself turns into an obstacle. The more holy we get, the more puffed up our egos become, and this removes us from fellowship with other ordinary people. In the quest to kill the ego, we feed it ever more food and tell ourselves that we are becoming truly spiritual. This is something I have personally experienced in my own life, and it was a core insight in Shinran's teaching, as important in its own way to the Shin teaching as the Primal Vow itself.

In answer to this dilemma, Jodo Shinshu offers us some wonderful advice: just relax. I'm reminded of the parable that Ken Tanaka tells in his book *Ocean*. A sailor is on a boat in the middle of the ocean when one night he accidentally falls overboard. The ship leaves him behind and he is all alone in the water. He struggles and struggles to stay afloat, splashing about wildly and tangling himself in his water-logged clothes. He gets more and more tired, and it looks like he will never survive. But just when things seem hopeless, he realizes that he doesn't have to struggle. He relaxes and lies back on his back, with his arms and legs spread comfortably around him. Just as he is, the ocean supports him and floats him along without any of his own effort. It was his own inadequate efforts that put him at risk, and now as he accepts the strength of the ocean in place of his own, he is delivered from danger. The ocean currents push him along, and he is brought to an island where he can find all his needs taken care of.

There's another image that comes to my mind when I think of the importance of relaxing in the Shin tradition. Have you seen the old *Far Side* cartoon by Gary Larson that shows a boy trying to get into the school for gifted children? He's standing outside pushing and pushing on the door, but he just can't get in. Meanwhile, he's so consumed by his futile efforts that he completely fails to notice the sign on the door that says "pull." This is basically the Shin view of life boiled down to its essence. We strive and strive and strive, all the while failing to perceive that the door of awakening opens inward. When we get out of the way and let the process happen naturally, we are liberated by Amida without having to become saints or Zen masters.

The next keyword is trust. As I discussed when I talked about inner togetherness, your life is given to you by countless things in the universe. Instead of focusing on our selfish desires, we are better off learning to appreciate and trust the interconnectedness that sustains us. From before the moment we were born, innumerable causes and conditions have been leading to our life. Whether it continues for another day or for another 100 years, each moment is a precious gift that we receive unearned. Our lives are upheld by sun, moon, dirt, air, water, family, friends, coworkers, society, plants, animals, and all things. Everything we need to live is here already, and we can be happy with what we have. This point

has further importance for Shin Buddhists, who rely on the great compassion of Amida Buddha as assurance that we are fine just as we are, and that our worries will not follow us into the next world—indeed, they need not plague us even now if we can open our hearts to trust in Other Power. For Shin Buddhists, trusting in power beyond the self, the power of great compassion, is the way beyond the suffering caused by attachment to the false self.

In Buddhism we talk about how we seek to go over to the other shore, to nirvana, the Pure Land, buddhahood. But in Jodo Shinshu we don't have to ferry ourselves all the way across the vast ocean of delusion. Instead, the other shore is constantly coming over here to us. Shinran says that "There has never been any separation: Amida's vast vow always, of itself, grasps and holds beings. This is the necessary way of its working." It is when we relax and trust that we are transformed. It makes me think of trips I used to take when I was little to the Boston Aquarium with my family. They had a gigantic tank there which had to be at least three stories tall. At least, that's how it seemed to me when I was a small boy. And of course they keep the really big fish in there, especially the sharks. The top of the tank is open, so you can go up to the balcony and look directly down into the water. My father would pick me up and hold me out over it so that I could see better. And as I looked down, I would see those sharks and start to get really nervous and begin squirming around. I was afraid that my dad would drop me in, and I was squirming to get away so that I would be safe. But of course the more I squirmed the more danger I put myself in. And I think the sharks could read the situation pretty clearly, because in my memory they would start circling around and swimming right near the surface in anticipation. I don't think sharks have lips, but if they did, they were probably licking them. Anyway, obviously I never did get dropped, since I'm here today. The point is that I would have been safer if I had just relaxed and trusted that my father would hold on to me. I was never in any real danger except when I failed to trust.

In a similar fashion, the Shin teaching as I've received it is that it is through trusting in Other Power that we are brought to an awareness of our inner connection and our indebtedness to others. And it is this sense of indebtedness that leads to the third of my keywords: thank. Probably the single most distinctive thing about Shin is that it is only expressive. The true and real practice of the nembutsu does not beg for salvation, does not create good karma, does not focus the mind, does not bring about any of the benefits that we vainly chase after. Instead, when we realize how we are benefitted just as we are, gratitude arises naturally from within and we express it by saying nembutsu in joy and humility. Nembutsu in the Shin tradition is a grateful expression of thanksgiving: it is an end,

not a means. The path has already been accomplished for us, and our part is simply to relax, trust, and say thank you, thank you, Namu Amida Butsu.

This is a one-time and a many-times process. First we have an initial experience of relaxing, trusting, and thanking, which helps the Shin path come to feel meaningful in our own lives. And then throughout our lives we are able to relax ever more, trust ever more, thank ever more. As Shinran says in the *Kyogyoshinsho*, “My joy grows ever fuller, my gratitude and indebtedness grow ever more compelling.” This is a beautiful vision of the spiritual life, where instead of chasing after enlightenment and holiness, we rest in boundless compassion and allow our joy to grow ever fuller, where we are compelled by gratitude rather than fear, greed, or obligation.

Of course, our expressions of gratitude are not limited to saying the *nembutsu*. We can also say thank you by being good to others and by helping to make this world a better place for all. As I indicated earlier, I don’t think we can necessarily solve all the problems of this suffering world. But for myself at least, my sense of gratitude motivates me to try and improve the lot of others. There are an unlimited number of ways in which we can do this, such as through being kind in our interactions with other people, through volunteering, voting, and so on. To me, when these are carried out as expressions of thanksgiving, then they become a sort of *nembutsu* in action. In a way it mirrors the trajectory of the Pure Land. First we are brought to the Pure Land, where we encounter true reality and are freed of our blind passions to become awakened buddhas and bodhisattvas. Then we immediately leave the Pure Land and return to *samsara* in order to help out those who are still stuck. In the same way, we relax and trust and are brought to awareness of our indebtedness, which leads to compassionate action on behalf of others.

I believe that this three-part system of relaxing, trusting, and thanking is a message we should be sharing with others. Although they are deeply meaningful to me, it often seems that Amida/Pure Land/shinjin and so on may be too difficult or foreign for people to understand or relate to. The important thing then is that we communicate what it is that we derive from these core elements of the tradition. This we can do by explaining and showing to others the path to liberation through relaxing, trusting, and thanking.

Obviously, this does not mean that we hide Amida/Pure Land/etc, only that we develop a vocabulary that allows us to transmit Shinran’s Dharma ideas without stressing foreign concepts. Plenty of times I have been in situations where I only had a moment to talk about Shin Buddhism. Perhaps I was going up an

elevator and someone asked about the Buddhist bracelet on my wrist, or I was at work and a co-worker passing my cubicle happened to notice a Buddhist graphic on my computer screen. In such circumstances, you don't have the time to explain the entire Jodo Shinshu tradition. And frankly, almost no one is going to be able to remember the words "Namu Amida Butsu" and "shinjin" once they've walked away. So perhaps when we are asked what Buddhism is about, we can reference this formula and say that it's about relaxing, trusting, and giving thanks. And if we have a moment more, we can add that for Shin Buddhists specifically, we relax and trust in Buddha's compassion, and say Namu Amida Butsu in thankfulness and also express our gratitude in service to others. Then we can invite friends to visit our temples if they are interested to learn more.

Even if they don't come, they will get a positive impression of Shin Buddhism, and their own religious lives will be benefitted by considering the value of relaxing, trusting, and thanking as spiritual paths. They don't have to become Buddhists—and realistically, Shin will never be the majority religion in this or any other country. But we can still help them to be better Christians, better Jews, better Muslims through reflecting on the value of relaxing, trusting, and thanking, and some will also be in the right place that they do hear the Dharma more fully and come to investigate our temples. The important thing is that this approach meets them where there are—in total ignorance of Jodo Shinshu—rather than expecting them to be able to navigate a whole language of insider terms and concepts, and that we remember that ultimately it isn't us against them. We're all in it together, and if our chance encounters can be of benefit to non-Buddhists, that is another way of being inclusive-minded without expecting them to have to become just like us.

We can meet personal challenges with this formula too. For those of you who've read my book *Buddhism of the Heart*, this is a story I told in the book but I'll offer it here too. I remember when our son was born. There were serious complications and both his life and my wife's life were in danger. After many hours they finally managed to get him out, but it wasn't clear whether my wife would survive. I recall her mother pleading with the doctors as my wife was taken away to surgery, begging them "please don't let her die!" Through all of this, there was just absolutely nothing that I could do. I couldn't help with the surgery or stop the bleeding or assist in any way. I was totally useless and helpless.

All that I could do was relax, trust, and let things take their course. When I did so, it didn't magically take away all my fear and worry, but it did allow me to realize that things were out of my hands, and that no matter how bad they got, somehow we would make it through and things would work out the way they

would. Letting go of my attachment to saving the situation myself brought about a sudden overwhelming feeling of relief and thankfulness inside that transcended the fear. While I waited to learn what the future would be, I was able to feel grateful for the time I had been given with my wife, and appreciate my son's arrival despite the difficulties of his birth. Unable to stop myself, I walked up and down the street outside saying nembutsu, just letting the situation be what it was as I relaxed and returned to Amida Buddha, my foundation.

This morning I quoted from Rennyō's biography. There's another line in that text which struck me as very odd when I first read it, but that as I reflected on it made more and more sense to me. It just says that Rennyō, who was the leader of a massive religious movement and had plenty of helpers, washed his own children's diapers. This bit of trivia is just thrown in there amongst all the stories about how great Rennyō was. When you first read it, you don't know why it would possibly be included. But now that I have children of my own, I think I know exactly what Rennyō was up to. Surely he changed his own children's diapers because he felt thankful for their lives, and they taught him thankfulness for what had been done for him by his own parents and others. I know that in my case having kids made me very aware of my indebtedness and the sacrifices that had been made on my behalf.

So, that's relaxing, trusting, and thanking. I believe this is a formula that captures the essence of the Jodo Shinshu process of awakening within our ordinary lives, and which can be easily communicated to outsiders without needing any specialized jargon. Now I want to move on to the other topic I promised to cover: fearlessness.

There's a lot of fear in America these days, isn't there? The newspapers and the television are constantly telling us what to be afraid of and angry about. We should be afraid of Obama, he's going to send grandma to a death panel. We should be afraid of terrorists, they're going to light their shoes on fire and blow up all the airplanes. We should be afraid of Muslims, they're going to build a mosque on top of Ground Zero and force us all to obey Islamic law. We should be afraid of global warming, the polar ice caps are going to melt and we're all going to drown. The worst part of it is all the conflicting information about health and food. Yesterday eggs were good for you and butter was bad, today butter is good and eggs are bad, tomorrow they'll both be bad, and next week it'll be back to where it started. My wife is really susceptible to this. I can only say this because she's not here with us this weekend. She reads a lot of magazines, and every week she tells me about some new study that says that something our family eats or uses is going to give us five kinds of cancer and cause us to grow an extra eyeball. Usually, the

next week she'll read a new study that contradicts the first one. So we never know how to act. The only message we really receive is that the world is a threatening place full of hidden danger, and that it's impossible to know how to avoid it all, so you have to be on constant guard. This can cause people to get frozen in an attitude of perpetual fear and anxiety.

Of course, some of this is basic Buddhism. The Buddha taught that the world of samsara is inherently topsy-turvy and touched by suffering, and no one can be fully secure, no matter how rich or powerful or beautiful or smart they are. Only nirvana is stable, peaceful, blissful, and without danger. Shinran affirmed this too, pointing out how his time period was full of troubles and that only the Pure Land is free of trouble and strife.

Obviously, there are a lot of problems in life, and we should try to be aware of them. I'm not saying we should be like the ostrich who just sticks his head in the sand. There are serious challenges facing our world and ourselves as individuals. But at the same time, I feel like there is an excess of fear that grips American society, and this is something that Jodo Shinshu can directly offer help with. A lot of times, we're being told to be afraid not because people are trying to be helpful to us, but because they can make money off of our fear. They tell us to be afraid of aging, and then sell us a skin cream to remove wrinkles. They tell us to be afraid of illness, and then sell us expensive medicines. They tell us to be afraid of the other political party, and then ask us to vote for themselves. Fear isn't just a wise caution anymore: it's a whole industry designed to control and exploit us. Do you guys ever watch Fox News? I do sometimes. I'd love to see them lead off with a story like, "today, Barack Obama was a pretty normal guy who didn't do anything wrong, there weren't any shootings in parts of the country that you've never been to and aren't really relevant to your life, there really wasn't anything worth getting angry about, and we're just going to spend the next thirty minutes showing videos of puppies. Goodnight." The funny thing is, they'd probably be out of business the next day if they that. Fear sells; peacefulness and normality, not so much.

In such an environment, I feel that religion should act as a counter-balance against excessive fear and worry. But what do we actually find when we turn to religion? Most religions are busy playing the fear game too, telling us we better do and believe exactly what they say or else we'll suffer a fate that's far worse than wrinkles, illness, and bad politics. Believe in Jesus Christ as your lord and savior or you're going to roast in Hell for eternity. Submit to Allah or be attacked as an infidel. We even find it in Buddhism in several ways. Right action is part of the fundamental Buddhist path, and it goes without saying that we should do our best

to act in ways that reduce suffering, both our own and that of others. But some people try to force others to act right by scaring them about karma and punishment. For example, in Thailand I visited a temple that had a large sculpture park. The theme of the park was the karmic punishments in the hell realms. They had life-size statues of people being tortured by animal-headed demons, being forced to climb up trees covered in spikes, and all sorts of gruesome things that I won't describe. Let me tell you, it was as bad as a modern-day R-rated horror film. This Hell Park was very popular, and the number one customers they had were school groups. Teachers and parents would always bring large groups of children to come and see the terrible, bloody tortures caused by bad karma, and use it to frighten the kids into obeying their parents and not breaking the law.

Another way that Buddhists have often used fear is to make money off of others. For example, hell beliefs have been very important in Japan too. Until the 1980s, the Soto Zen school used to teach that all women are sinful and that they are reborn in hell into a pool of boiling blood, where they suffer terribly. The only way to avoid this fate was to pay the Zen priests to do a Blood-pool Hell ritual that would free you or your mom from your bad karma. On a less dramatic, but even more profitable, scale, this sort of thing is very common in modern Japan. Have you ever been to a temple in Japan, other than a Honganji one? At most places, you will find them selling omamori, which are magic amulets to ward off bad luck. Some temples in the Zen, Nichiren, and other traditions make much of their yearly budget off of these lucky charms and rituals designed to have similar effects. They have ones for every kind of fear that the Japanese have. There are omamori to prevent a bad grade on a test, to prevent car accidents and plane crashes, to prevent illness, to prevent injury to your children, and so on. One of the most popular trends is marketing charms to elderly people in Japan, who are told to be afraid of getting old and dying. So there are Buddhist pillowcases that you can buy: they have been blessed by Kannon Bodhisattva, and when you lie on it at night, it will prevent you from going senile. And there are special Buddhist underwear you can buy too: they have been blessed by the priests so when you wear it, you won't experience incontinence. I'm sure it's only a matter of time before they start marketing Buddhist Viagra. One extremely successful new trend is temples dedicated to easy deaths: you pay the priest and he prays that you will die suddenly in your sleep. Of course, none of these magical practices actually work.

My point here is that religion is very often involved in exploiting our fears, sometimes supposedly for our own good, sometimes in order to make money and control us. And it is this fear-ridden situation, both in normal society and in religion, that I think Shinran has something to offer to. Shinran says that people of the nembutsu are protected by Amida and by all the powers in the universe. For

example, when we chant the Shoshinge, we say “The light of compassion that grasps us illumines and protects us always.” Shinran puts it even more eloquently in the Kyogyoshinsho when he says that ordinary nembutsu practitioners are “constantly illumined by the light of the Buddha's heart, grasped and protected, never to be abandoned.” Throughout his writings Shinran constantly assures people that they have nothing to fear, because they are watched over by benevolent forces. Among those he lists are Amida, Shakyamuni, Kannon, Daiseishi bodhisattva, all the Buddhas of the universe, all the gods of heaven and earth, the four Dharma protector kings, dragons, and even evil spirits.

That last item is particularly interesting to me, who grew up with a wealth of ghost stories. Throughout Asian Buddhist history, including in Japan, monks have accepted donations in order to pacify or exorcise dangerous spirits. Maybe we could say that Buddhist monks are the original Ghostbusters. The nembutsu was used in this way too before Shinran came along, as a way to ward off ghosts and demons. The ancient Japanese believed they lived in a world of spirits and kami, and that they had to constantly be on their guard. The elite Buddhist institutions like Mt. Hiei and Koyasan often exploited these fears to keep the masses in line and to gather donations—in fact, the gigantic monastic complex of Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei where Shinran practiced was founded in order to protect Kyoto from the supposed bad luck that came from the Northeast, and the monks were paid by the government to pray for the ruling powers. But after Shinran came down from Mt. Hiei and started the Jodo Shinshu movement, he completely threw out all practices designed to protect people from spirits or bad luck, because they were unnecessary. To live in the nembutsu is to already be protected.

There's something very special going here with Shinran. Unlike in most religions, he doesn't fill people with fear. He never says that we should be afraid of Amida, or Kannon, or other figures. We don't tell our kids that they better eat all their veggies or else Rennyō will get them. Often, other people are supposed to love God but are also told to be afraid of God. A Roman Catholic friend of mine told me recently that “God is a jealous God,” and the Old Testament says that “fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.” That's an attitude I've never been able to understand. How can you fully love someone who threatens to hurt you, or damn you, or even to annihilate you? It just doesn't seem possible to me. And how could something really be God if it possessed such petty, mean-spirited emotions as jealousy and anger? It may seem incredible, but much of the human race worships jealous, petty gods, and a great many people are struggling with the impossible spiritual task of both loving and living in fear of their deities.

Meanwhile, Amida only always embraces all beings, no matter who they are. That's a very special message. We never say "Amida is a jealous Buddha" or "Fear of Amida is the beginning of wisdom." These sentences sound absurd, even humorous, because they are so completely alien to the Shin tradition. And furthermore, Shinran says that we should not be worried about our afterlife, because it is taken care of by Amida. In fact, in Tannisho Shinran says that he isn't concerned about whether the nembutsu will lead him to the Pure Land or to Hell: he just completely trusts in Other Power and relaxes into his own natural state of being. Of course, Shinran elsewhere emphasizes that indeed all beings will go to the Pure Land through the assistance of Amida. The point here isn't about beliefs, it is about attitudes. You may or may not believe that Amida literally protects people from harm or that ghosts exist. These aren't really so important. What is important is to notice that the nembutsu teaching created by Shinran was designed to function in a way that relieved everyday people of their fear and anxiety, instead of trying to make money off of it.

Shinran also says that we don't have to be afraid of bad karma. Even if our passions and delusions overwhelm us and we can't help committing some sort of wrong action, we are still embraced and will be delivered from hellish consequences. As he puts it, when polluted streams enter the vastness of the ocean, they are all purified and transformed into the essence of enlightenment. All of this means that because of Shinran's insight, Jodo Shinshu is one of the very few religions in the world that is not based on fear.

Because, at least in its ideal form, there is no fear of judgment or superstition in Shin Buddhism, there is much less economic opportunity for exploitation of the laity than in other religions. We don't have to go to confession and make donations to the church in order to pay off our debt to God; nor do we have anything like the televangelists who swear that if you'll just show your love of God by sending in money, then heaven will reward you with acres of diamonds. We don't have to pay priests to keep us safe from ghosts. We have funeral and memorial services, but they are supposed to be about comforting the living and remembering those we love, not about enabling the deceased to go to the Pure Land. Amida has already embraced them, and we have nothing to worry about. Therefore, if we are too poor or otherwise unable to hold a memorial, it doesn't matter whatsoever. Also, we aren't required to pay for all the expensive paraphernalia around funeral services and tombstones that you see in other forms of Buddhism. Now I know that in actual practice we have a lot of the same sorts of periodic memorial services and posthumous ordinations as other denominations. But fundamentally these things are not central to the logic of Shinshu practice, and

if we stopped doing them there wouldn't be any impact on Shin teaching or understanding.

There are other implications of Shinran's approach to religion. Shinran said that we don't need to do anything in order to earn a spot in the Pure Land. In fact, he said that if we egotistically try to become saints or buddhas then we will fail, because self-attachment is the source of troubles according to Buddhism. Instead, Shinran implored us to let go of self-clinging and trust in power-beyond-self. Whereas our limited efforts may fail, Other Power never fails to bring us to the fulfillment of the Buddhist path. Therefore, we don't need to be afraid of our negative personality traits or limitations. All of our personal failings are taken in by Amida and transformed into the wisdom of enlightenment. So our bad aspects do not hold us back. This is such a wonderful gift. We may be lazy, or slow-witted, or hyperactive, or judgmental. It doesn't matter—these things won't prevent us from receiving liberation. We are embraced, warts and all. Therefore, there is no need for anxiety in Jodo Shinshu. We can just relax and say the nembutsu in gratitude. This is why Rennyō talked about shinjin as anjin, the peaceful heart. Those who have awakened to the grasp of Amida are at peace, without fear and anxiety. Sure, they may have difficult times in their lives, but fundamentally they know that they are enveloped in great compassion, and every day is another chance to recognize all that we receive and say thank you.

The flip side of this is that if there is nothing we need to do to get into the Pure Land, then we are enabled to try our best without fear of failure. If you try to live a moral life, but ultimately you can't help the fact that when you drive at night, your car kills bugs, and you just can't seem to give up your attachment to teriyaki chicken, then it's still alright. You don't have to be perfect in Jodo Shinshu, which gives us permission to simply try to be our best, whatever that means for each of us as individuals. If you're not very good at meditation, or can't remember all the steps in the Noble Eightfold Path, or don't really understand what emptiness means, it's OK. To the extent that we live as good Buddhists, our lives and the lives of those around us will be enriched and benefitted. To the extent that we fail to live as perfect Buddhists, we will be drawn on by Other Power and still enter the Pure Land together.

In religion, Shinran is my main guide and role model. When I think of him, I think of a man who was deeply in touch with reality, and who was brave in his beliefs. In the *Kyogyoshinsho* he points out that “fearlessness” is one of the names of nirvana. He was a person who was willing to “speak truth to power,” as they say. He had the strength to stick to his unpopular views that Amida embraced everyone, even the poor and illiterate. He went into exile, and he even criticized

the emperor himself. Now that's chutzpah! He was truly fearless, but he wasn't a jerk about it. The Pure Land way gave him not only comfort but also courage, and he did what he felt was right, helping others even when he knew there would be a cost to himself.

I think we can take a lesson here for ourselves. We live in a non-Buddhist culture. Now, things aren't nearly as bad as they used to be. If you have any doubts, just ask the Nisei about what it used to be like to be out of the mainstream in American culture. Canada too, I have to say. Today things are much, much better, thank goodness. But we're still a small minority, and we can run into problems. More to the point, we ourselves can be the problem. We may not talk about Buddhism with others because we may be afraid that they will reject us. Or we may be afraid that we won't be able to explain Shinshu very well, and be embarrassed. Thus, for fear of the possibility of receiving a single difficult question about Buddhism, we fail to even talk about it at all with others who might benefit from encountering the Dharma. When such fears arise, I hope we can think of Shinran's example, and take heart. The difficulties we face in telling others about Jodo Shinshu are nothing compared to the ones he faced, and yet he was able to endure hardship and cause the nembutsu to flourish throughout Japan. More than seven centuries years later, the efforts he made are still paying off all the way here in Honolulu. So too, the challenges that the Issei and Nisei faced in being Buddhist in the first half of the twentieth century make our own difficulties look very small. So let us put away fear and go forward boldly with courage instead.

If Shin Buddhism is the religion of "no worries," then that's a message that we can apply in our own lives and seek to tell others about. For ourselves, I think about something I read in an essay published by the Hongwanji International Center. They said: "Through the Nembutsu we discover a way to live our life to the utmost, with the appreciation for the splendors of life." That really captures the spirit of Shinshu. We are given a way to live our life to the utmost, without fear and anxiety. Instead, all that energy that in other religions is taken up with fear and worry, is used for appreciating the splendors of life. How marvelous!

In my opinion, we need to spread this message to others. If we look around at society, we will find great numbers of two kinds of people: those who believe that religion must involve terror and anxiety in the face of an angry, dangerous God, and those who feel that religion is a con-game left over from an earlier, ignorant age, and designed to frighten people into submission. Both of these groups can benefit from exposure to Jodo Shinshu, which suggests that religion can flourish without fear and enhance life in a stressful, materialistic culture that lacks

appreciation of the great fortune we experience in North America and the sacrifices that have been made to support our lifestyles.

In Jodo Shinshu, the religion of fearlessness, we are given the gift of a peaceful heart and a mind free from religious anxiety. In this way, we can see that Shin is not just another old Japanese religion, but an actual revolution in human religious history. I hope that we can appreciate this profound revolution that Shinran started, and do our part to keep it going. And as we rise above our fears and seek to offer the riches of our tradition to others outside the Shin community, we can teach them the importance of relaxing, trusting, and thanking. With the combination of a universalistic vision, such as I described in my first lecture, and a plain-English form of communication that conveys our unique Shin Buddhist values, I believe that we can help Jodo Shinshu to become a religion adapted to contemporary America and able to reach out to and include the incredible diversity of people we find in our nation today. Thank you very much.