

VII.JODO SHINSHU

A. Know that I belong to the Jodo Shinshu denomination of Buddhism.

Do the following:

- _____ 1. Who is responsible for the founding of Jodo Shinshu and why? (CS-8b)
(Page VII-1)
- _____ 2. Do Me and My Religion (Page VII-2)

B. Know that Jodo Shinshu is the True Pure Land Religion. (Pages VII-3, VII-4, VII-5, VII-6, VII-7, VII-8, VII-9, VII-10, VII-11)

Do one of the following:

- _____ 1. Meet with minister to listen to Jodo Shinshu information.(CS-8)
- _____ 2. List a few of the outstanding characteristics of Jodo Shinshu. (CS-8c)
- _____ 3. Attend a service of another denomination and compare. (J-2a)

C. Know that we are embraced by Amida. (Pages VII-12, VII-13)

Do the following:

- _____ 1. Read the "Sermon of Vulture's Peak" (need to do this to know 48 vows) (Page VII-14)
- _____ 2. Know that of the 48 vows in Jodo Shinshu, the 18th Vow is the most important.
- _____ 3. Identify Amida as Wisdom and Compassion. (Page VII-15)
- _____ 4. Know the meaning of gratitude. (B-3a) (Page VII-16)
- _____ 5. Recite the Four Gratitudes (Page VII-17, VII-18, VII-19, VII-20, VII-21)
- _____ 6. Lead the family in words of thanksgiving before dinner. Share with the class. (B-3d). (Page VII-22)
- _____ 7. Express gratitude before and after meals. (Page VII-23)
- _____ 8. Discuss the meaning of Dana and Compassion in your life. (J-3a)
- _____ 9. Apply the Golden Chain of Love at home and at school (B-2a; B-2b; J-9a) (Page VII-24)
- _____ 10. Recite the Shinshu Pledge. (Page VII-25)

REFLECTION: I recite "Namu Amida Butsu" every day reflecting on the teachings of Shinran Shonin in sincere gratitude.

Introduction

We are Buddhists of the Jodo Shin Shu.

The founder of the Jodo Shin Shu was Shinran Shonin.¹

Who was this great man who explained Buddhism so all people may understand and follow the Buddha's teachings? Why is the way of Shinran called the true religion? What incidents in his life made him what he was?

¹Shonin is a title of respect and veneration given to a great religious teacher or leader of Buddhism in Japan by the people themselves and not necessarily conferred on a person through ecclesiastical action. Shonin is rather difficult to translate and perhaps the only approximate word in English may be Saint.

How Jodo Shin Shu Became an Independent Religion

Today, all Buddhists recognize the name Jodo Shin Shu as the name of an independent religion. However, this was not the case in Shinran's time. While Shinran was living, there was no special denomination called Jodo Shin Shu.

Although Shinran often used the Jodo Shin Shu in his writings, he did not mean to imply that his way of teaching should be established into an independent order. Whenever he used "Jodo Shin Shu," he meant "true teachings" as it was taught to him by his master, Honen. Shinran's feelings were that he was not teaching anything new, but merely carrying on the work of his master.

Shinran claimed no disciples for himself. He said that everyone was a beloved child of the Buddha; everyone was Buddha's disciple.

The followers of Shinran were comforted by his words, and they were ever-grateful to Shinran for awakening them to the religious life.

After Shinran's death, his youngest daughter Kakushinni, with the aid of the faithful followers, helped keep the group together and kept Jodo Shin Shu traditions alive. Thereafter, descendants of Shinran from one generation to the next took the lead in keeping contact with the followers. As time went on, they gradually began to think of Shinran as the founder of a new religious school. It was in this matter that Jodo Shin Shu grew from the hearts of the people who wished to see Shinran's way of Buddhism preserved and perpetuated.

It was Kakunyo, the great grandson of Shinran, who firmly established Jodo Shin Shu in the form of an order.

The head temple in Kyoto was given the name Honganji which means the Temple of the Original Vow. Jodo Shin Shu—literally translated as the True Pure Land Religion—was the name used by the new Buddhist Order. Shinran Shonin who had never given any thought to founding a new school for Buddhism was proclaimed the founder. The *Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho* written by Shinran became its fundamental text and 1224—when the first draft of this valuable book was completed—became established as the founding year.

ME AND MY RELIGION

I am a B_____ . I belong to the

J_____ S_____ sect of Buddhism. Jodo Shinshu is

T_____ P_____ L_____ Religion. The founder

of the Jodo Shinshu Sect was S_____

S_____.

I attend _____ (temple). I pay

homage to A_____, who represents

w_____ and c_____. I say the words

N_____ A_____ B_____ which is also

called the N_____ as a way to show my

gratitude.

Utterance of the Name (Nembutsu)— Expression of Gratitude

If someone we truly trust is the source of our gratitude, our hearts will spontaneously utter that person's name. For example, if a friend sacrifices his time to help us in a crisis, it is only natural that we identify that person and all that he did through speaking his name. With that experience, whenever we think of that name a number of very important thoughts will flood our minds and hearts.

First, we will feel that the sacrifice took a lot of time and effort.

Second, without that person we would not have been able to get through the crisis. In fact, it is because of that person that we were able to get through the crisis.

Third, we will feel humble with the realization that we have such a friend.

Fourth, we will feel the inconceivable nature of the relationship. That is, from within the vast human race we were able to meet with such a person.

The above are but a few of the thoughts that we will have. However, because of these, the friend's name becomes a natural utterance of gratitude for us.

In Jodo Shinshu, the realization of the above feelings in relation to Amida Buddha's Compassion is called Shinjin. The natural utterance of the Name in gratitude is called Nembutsu. Shinran Shonin says: "The True Shinjin is necessarily accomplished by the utterance of the Name."

In Jodo Shinshu, the utterance of the Name spontaneously follows the awakening to Shinjin. Generally, the utterance is termed our expression of gratitude for being endowed with Shinjin and being assured of Birth in the Pure Land of Enlightenment.

Even with the endowed attainment of Shinjin and the Utterance of the Name, we often times think that the utterance is our own practice. We feel the need to do something. Yet, it must be remembered that with our awakening to Shinjin we are assured of Birth; therefore, we need no other practice. Shinjin is the true cause for Birth and Enlightenment; therefore, our utterance is termed an expression of gratitude, that is, Nembutsu of gratitude.

Also, we may think that by uttering the Name we attain virtues; however, this is not the case. One of the unique features about uttering the Nembutsu is that we do not think we attain virtues. Actually, with Shinjin all the virtues are already attained through the Compassion of Amida Buddha. In truth, the virtues are embodied in the Name that is uttered and not in the utterance by us. Yet, because the virtues are embodied in the Name, the Name, coming through our grateful utterance, has the power to embrace other beings still caught in delusion.

Thus we see that the utterance of the Name is the result of the awakened Shinjin endowed upon us by the Compassionate Buddha through the fulfilled Eighteenth Vow.

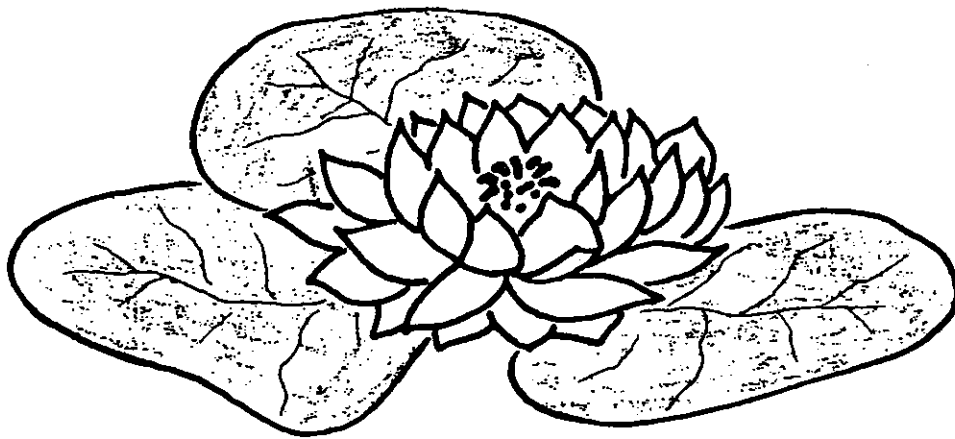
Previously, it has been said that with the awakening to Shinjin we are assured the Birth in the Pure Land of Enlightenment. Then, what is meant by Birth in the Pure Land of the Jodo Shinshu?

南无阿弥陀佛

NAMU
AMIDA
BUTSU

VII-4

NAMU AMIDA BUTSU



We say “Namu Amida Butsu”
and Amida Buddha answers,
“Here, here I am with you.”

“TEACHING, PRACTICE, FAITH AND ATTAINMENT”

Shinran Shōnin never claimed that he was founding a new religion. He was merely stating the true purpose of Śākyamuni's advent on earth - which was to awaken mankind to the Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha. After Śākyamuni's Nirvāṇa, seven patriarchs transmitted the heart of Amida Buddha over the centuries. They were Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu in India; Donran, Dōshaku and Zendō in China and Genshin and Hōnen in Japan.

In the “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment” Shinran Shōnin quoted from the writings of these patriarchs to support his faith in Amida Buddha.

THE THREE SUTRAS

From the voluminous Buddhist Tripitaka Shinran Shōnin selected the following three sutras that bring us directly to the heart of Amida Buddha.

1. The Larger Sūtra on the Eternal Life. In this sutra Śākyamuni tells the Sangha about Amida Buddha.
2. The Meditation Sūtra on the Eternal Buddha. This sūtra shows the actual case of a woman who finds salvation through Amida Buddha.
3. The Smaller Sūtra on Amida Buddha. This sūtra describes the beauty of the Pure Land and extolls the virtues of Amida Buddha.

THE THREE-FOLD BODY OF BUDDHA

Trikāya, meaning three bodies, is not three separate bodies but three aspects of the one body of Buddhahood. Buddha as Dharmakāya (Body of Truth) resides in everything. The Dharmakāya is impersonal law, principle, ultimate reality - the Truth of the Universe. It is indescribable and inexpressible. The Buddha as Sambhogakāya (accommodated Body) is personal and appears before our religious awareness as Amida Buddha of Wisdom and Compassion. Buddha as Nirmanakaya

(Manifested Body) refers to the historical Buddha who appeared on earth as Śākyamuni 2500 years ago.

In Jōdo Shinshū the object of worship is Amida Buddha. Amida is depicted artistically as an active Buddha in a standing position, hands held up in a gesture of bestowing blessings on all beings and leaning slightly forward - symbolizing the eternal activity of Wisdom and Compassion.

The Primal Vow of Amida Buddha promises Universal Enlightenment for all beings. In all the religions of the world there is no vow that has such a sweeping power, promising hope and life's fulfillment to all human beings as well as all living things. The all compassionate activity of Amida Buddha will never cease so long as beings are lost, forlorn, suffering or wandering in a meaningless existence.

NAME

The Name is Namo Amida Butsu, literally meaning, “I place my faith in Amida Buddha.” The power of universal salvation consummated by Amida is embodied in this sacred name, which is easy to keep in our minds as well as easy to recite. Amida Buddha communicates with us through his Name. The Name has three aspects. Its substance is perfect virtue and ultimate value which Amida Buddha was able to perfect on our behalf. It possesses the absolute power to save all sentient beings. Its form is two fold: it is Amida Buddha's voice calling to us and at the same time is our vocal response to his call. Its meaning is the actualization of our salvation and complete assurance of our Enlightenment. Thus wherever there is “Namo Amida Butsu” there is Amida Buddha and wherever there is Amida Buddha, there is “Namo Amida Butsu.”

FAITH

When we truly hear the Name, Faith is awakened in our hearts. Hearing the Name is not merely hearing the sounds of "Namo Amida Butsu," but hearing Amida Buddha with our whole being, calling to us throughout timeless time. Thus, when we hear Amida's voice in our innermost being, faith is awakened. We now realize that this faith itself and even the power to awaken it is a gift from Amida Buddha. Faith completes our Oneness with Amida and is the true cause of our Enlightenment.

RECITATION OF THE NAME

The Awakening of faith naturally prompts a response to Amida Buddha. This is the Nembutsu of gratitude to Amida Buddha for salvation that is assured. Those who recite the Nembutsu in faith have attained the "ranks of the truly assured." Such persons live the life of Nembutsu.

PURE LAND

Absolute Enlightenment is attained in the Pure land after death when all the finite, limited qualities of the physical being are extinct. While the human weaknesses of greed, anger and ignorance are still functioning the perfection of personality is an impossibility.

Birth in the Pure Land means becoming a Buddha and achieving perfect Oneness with Amida Buddha. We are thus identified totally with Amida's Wisdom and Compassion. This Oneness is not a static end itself, for true Wisdom-Compassion is an active, moving spiritual force. So long as there is suffering and ignorance in the Universe the power of compassion will never cease its work of mercy. Thus we, who become one with Amida Buddha in the Pure Land, will return repeatedly to this shore of suffering for the salvation of all beings. Shinran Shōnin said,

"Though I, my life having run its course,
Return to the Pure Land of Eternal Rest,
Come back shall I to earth again and again
Just as the waves of Wakano-Ura Bay.
When alone you rejoice in the Sacred Teachings
Believe that there are two,
And when there are two to rejoice
Believe that there are three -
That other shall be Shinran."

The Pure Land ideal is the culmination of the teaching of Compassion and Wisdom.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

While the ultimate objective of life in Jōdo Shinshū lies in the achievement of Buddhahood, life's immediate purpose is realized in the awakening of faith. In this religious experience we know that we now live in Amida's Light. This is the spiritual state Shinran Shonin called the "ranks of the truly assured." The recitation of the Nembutsu - Namo Amida Butsu - flows naturally and clearly as waters from a mountain spring.

The life of faith has achieved a high level of internal organization. It will have developed the wisdom and the insight to understand the changing circumstances of life. Even under adverse conditions a man of faith will be strong because his inner conviction is strong. He has gained a new vision and dimension in his life. Because his spiritual roots reach down into the Compassion of Amida Buddha, his "taste" of life is inexpressibly sensitive. His religious acts are performed out of gratitude to Amida Buddha. He asks nothing of Amida but dedicates his whole being to him.

The Creed

We rely upon Tathagata Amitabha with our whole heart for the Enlightenment in the life to come, abstaining from all sundry practices and teachings, and giving up the trust in our powerless self.

We believe that the assurance of our Rebirth through his Salvation comes at the very moment we put our Faith in him; and we call the Name, Namu Amida Butsu, in happiness and thankfulness for his Mercy.

We also acknowledge gratefully the benign benevolence of our Founder and the succeeding Masters who have led us to believe in this profound teaching; and we do now endeavor to follow, throughout our lives, the Way laid down for us.

Nembutsu – An act of Purity

My voice which calls Amida's Name is mine—but in truth, it is Amida calling me.

It is not we, ourselves, who recite the Nembutsu, but Amida himself who, giving us his own Name, obliges us to repeat it.

This is why we say that whereas all our acts (other than Nembutsu) are, more or less, tainted with impurity, the reciting of Namu Amida Butsu is truly an act exempted from all impurity. It is not we that utter his Name, but it is Amida who speaks to himself. It is his own utterance breathed in his breath.

Therefore, lay it well to heart that uttering the Buddha's Name, or paying him homage or thinking of him, is not an act originating in ourselves, but it is doing the very act of Amida Buddha himself.

Faith must be Cultivated

Although Amida is constantly trying to awaken our faith, from our standpoint, faith does not come all of a sudden or at any certain time. Indeed, there is no set pattern. Anything that has to do with change in our personality does not come suddenly—compassion, faith, love—these are all a growing process. The realization of Amida's infinite wisdom and compassion is a continuing process that develops with growth and experience.

Faith in Amida has to be cultivated.

To become conscious of growing in Amida's Wisdom and Compassion, self-reflection is recommended. We must understand our selves and understand the nature of Amida's Great Wisdom.

Unlike the lower forms of animal that live instinctively from day to day, we are human beings capable of reflection. Let us take advantage of this ability to reflect and spend some time looking within.

By looking within, we find out more about ourselves and become aware of the necessity of accepting faith in Amida's Compassion and Wisdom.

Faith is Most Important

After being awakened to faith in Amida, Shinran continued to find deeper meaning and truer interpretation of his faith.

For example, until Shinran's time, the calling of Namu Amida Butsu loudly and repeatedly used to be a religious practice which was supposed to bring some kind of merit to the practitioner. Honen Shonin is said to have recited the Nembutsu tens of thousands of times a day. His disciple, Shinran, confessed, "Such a thing is an utter impossibility for me," to which Honen Shonin is said to have replied, "The number of times the Nembutsu is recited does not matter where there is true faith—"

It was upon these words of his master that Shinran based his declaration, "Mere repetition of the Nembutsu without faith is meaningless. No amount of reciting the Buddha's Name would produce enlightenment. As promised in the Great Vow, faith is most essential.¹⁷" He went on to add that when a person had acquired faith in Amida, but this did not necessarily mean that a person pronouncing the name of Amida had faith.

How can Amida Enter our Hearts?

We must first receive Faith from Amida. Faith is received from Amida when we feel an inward need for him. Amida never enters the heart of those who remain smug and self-satisfied. Faith is always preceded by humility—a sense of unworthiness and helplessness. Through humility, we realize our nature and our limitations.

As Shinran always said,
"Realization should come from within."

For example, when a child commits mischief, it does no good to tell him or yell at him that he is wrong; it only makes the child feel antagonistic. If the child is led to realize from within, and made to see that it was not right...that was Shinran's attitude of realization.

But, to ask man to cast away reliance on himself (self-power) is asking a great deal of man. This is not as easy as it sounds. Man's nature inclines him toward self-power. It is very difficult for man to be convinced of his inadequacy.

We cannot abandon reliance on "self-power" just by saying, "I shall abandon 'self-power- from today," and sit and wait for the awakening of faith.

Meaning of Life and Death

True joy in the Nembutsu is better appreciated when we understand the meaning of life and death. This is a curious thing, but nevertheless true.

We live from day to day without understanding the purpose of our life. We know that death must be faced sooner or later either in the loss of a loved one or by ourselves. A good question to ask is "What is the Buddhist interpretation of life and death?"

As Buddhists, we believe in the impermanence of all existence. At first glance, this thought may provoke a feeling of sadness. On the other hand, can we conceive of a world without change where things remain fixed? Such a world would be a dead world.

Because of change there is birth and creation and new events occur every day. There is growth and realization of dreams. By the same token, there is also death and destruction, precious memories fade away. There is old age and the end of dreams.

When we come to understand and accept impermanence as part of life, we begin to see things in their totality. A withering flower is no longer thought to be a faded blossom wasting away. A flower, thus faded, is accumulating energy to reproduce itself again.

We may say that death is the end of things, but when we see it under the light of Amida's Compassion and Wisdom, we know that it is only the beginning of a life that never dies.

To live is to die – to die is to live.

Many are the Paths of Enlightenment

The goal that all Buddhists seek is salvation in Buddhahood, the perfection of personality.

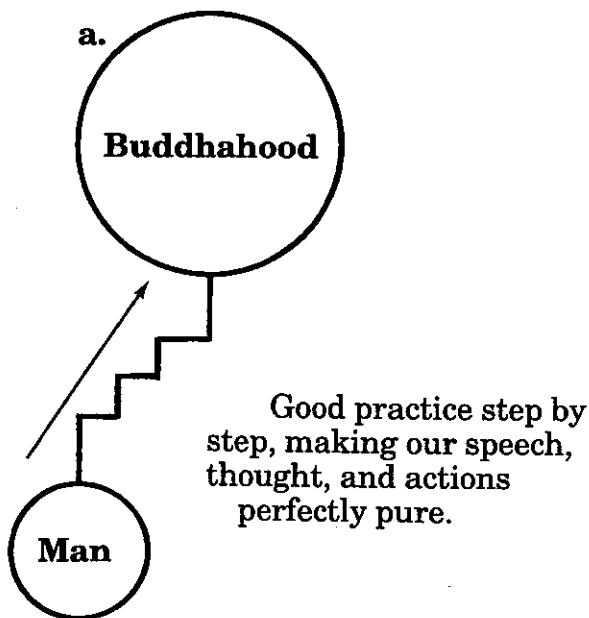
In the seventh grade Dharma school lessons on the development of Jodo Shinshu, it was learned that there were many ways to attain Buddhahood. In Buddhism, there are, specifically, two paths — (1) Holy Path of the Saints and (2) Pure Land Path.

On further study, we find that the Holy Path of the Saints may be divided into two main divisions — (a) Way of Practice and (b) Way of Meditation.

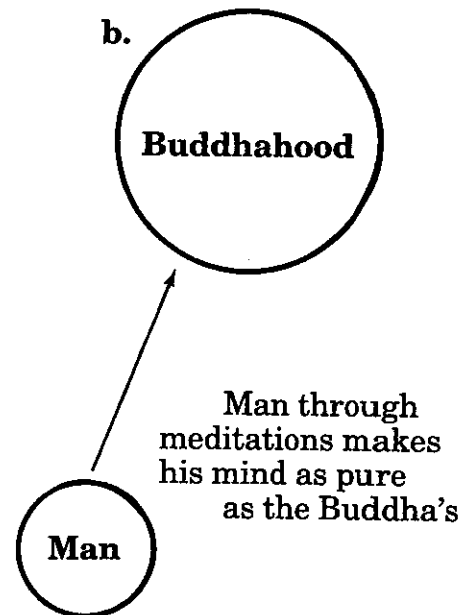
In the diagram showing the two ways of the Holy Path of the Saints, note how the arrow points upward. Man using his own self-power is doing all the striving. Perfect purity in practice and meditation are required to attain Buddhahood. For most people the requirements are so difficult; it becomes an absolute impossibility to gain Enlightenment in this manner.

Holy Path of the Saints

Way of Practice



Way of Meditation



Gautama Buddha's Greatest Teaching

To offer people the relief from their suffering, Gautama Buddha taught in many ways. But always, he found his greatest teaching in the teaching concerning the Eternal Buddha.

The face of the Blessed One became radiant with joy as he spoke of Amida Buddha. It was Ananda who first noticed the radiant facial expression of his master when he began speaking of Amida Buddha at Vulture's Peak. At that time, Ananda asked for the reason, and Gautama Buddha had replied:

O Ananda, the true purpose that I came into this world is to tell the people about Amida Buddha.

Over and over again, he told the people of Amida Buddha and his Forty-eight Vows. He told them of the most important vow, the 18th vow, which reads as follows:

Upon my attainment of Buddhahood, if the sentient beings in the ten quarters,* who have sincerity of heart, hold faith, and wish to be born in my land, repeating my name, perhaps up to ten times, would not be born therein, then may I not obtain the Great Enlightenment.

He told the people, "Have faith in my teaching of the Eternal Buddha. Trust completely in the teaching that is so easy to follow. Recite the Holy name of Amida, "Namu Amida Butsu" and the great compassion and wisdom of Amida will never cast you away. It may be hard to understand, and you may not be aware of this, but you are, indeed, already saved. The Bodhisattva Dharmakara accomplished your salvation when he became Amida Buddha thereby fulfilling his vows."

When the poor Queen Vaidehi found herself imprisoned by her own son, Gautama Buddha came accompanied by Ananda and Maudgalyayana and told her about Amida Buddha and the Pure Land. In speaking to her, the Blessed One made it clear that Amida Buddha is always with anyone who recites his Name—even in the dark corners within the prison walls.

When Gautama Buddha was about to pass away, he spoke of the Eternal Buddha.

The true Buddha is not a human body: it is Enlightenment. A human body must vanish, but the wisdom of Enlightenment will exist forever in the truths of the Dharma, and in the practice of the Dharma.

He who sees my body only, is not the one who truly sees me. He who accepts my teachings, is the one who truly sees me. After my death, Truth shall be your teacher. Follow the Truth and you will be true to me.

What Is The Nembutsu?

The Nembutsu is *Namu Amida Butsu*, and it means “I go to Amida Buddha for guidance.” It means we go to the Other Power for guidance, knowing that our self power cannot guide us to the Pure Land.

Namu Amida Butsu is our way of expressing gratitude to Amida for all His blessings. One of Amida’s 48 Vows is that His Name shall be heard throughout the universe. That is His way of saying we will all receive faith and go to the Pure Land. When *Namu Amida Butsu* is heard everywhere, He will be in the heart of every being.

To recite the Nembutsu is to glorify the Wisdom, Compassion and Power of Amida. His name (*Namu Amida Butsu*) is His Vow, so if with faith we recite the Nembutsu, we enter the Pure Land according to the Vow.

The Nembutsu can be called “practice” because by practicing the Nembutsu with faith, the Great Assurance of rebirth into the Pure Land comes to us. This Great Assurance is the result of practice, but we must remember the practice of faith comes from Amida. Faith is in us and *Namu Amida Butsu* comes from our lips, but yet it is entirely the working of the Other Power. Simple repetition of the Nembutsu without faith cannot be called “practice”, because there is no real merit in the Nembutsu without faith.

The essentials of the Nembutsu are these:

1. It means we trust the Other Power completely, giving up all trust in self power.
2. It expresses our gratitude for the saving Power of Amida.
3. To be real “practice” it must be accompanied with faith.

Talk with the students about the three great virtues of Amida: Great Wisdom, Great Compassion, Great Power.

THE SERMON AT VULTURE'S PEAK

Ref. "Lord Buddha Speaks to Me"
BCA, 1973.

"At Vulture's Peak near Rajagriha, the Blessed One spoke before a gathering of 12,000 monks. So that they would understand the Dharmakaya, the Truth. He spoke of Amida, the Eternal Buddha, who possesses both wisdom and compassion. In a manner understandable by people, he told them about Amida.

Many, many kalpas ago there reigned a king who heard the teaching of the Buddha and was soon converted. He renounced his throne, and became a seeker after the Truth. He was given the name Dharmakara (Dharma-akara).

Upon seeing the suffering of humanity, a deep well of compassion arose in his heart and he resolved that he would save mankind from suffering.

He made forty-eight vows before all beings of the universe, promising them that he would not become a Buddha until it was possible for all being to be born in his Pure Land.

Dharmakara practiced countless good deeds for the sake of all beings. For a long, long time (inconceivable time) he devoted his life to performing the duties of the Bodhisattva until he attained the highest, perfect enlightenment. Realizing wisdom and compassion, he became Amida Buddha.

By becoming a Buddha, he fulfilled his vows and accomplished the salvation of all mankind."

"NAMU AMIDA BUTSU"

The name "AMIDA" is the Japanese contraction of the two original names "Amitabha" and "Amitayus."

"Amitabha" means Infinite Light, which depicts Amida Buddha's immeasurable wisdom.

"Amitayus" means Eternal Life, which exemplifies Amida Buddha's great compassion.

Thus, the two names combined into one to formulate the name "Amida."

Amida's Great Wisdom

Amida's Great Wisdom is pure and undefiled, which means it is unlimited and the essence of truth. Amida's Great Wisdom is so perfect and unlimited it will never fail us. Ordinary wise men in this world have limited wisdom and they make mistakes, often now knowing what is best for themselves and for others. Amida's Great Wisdom is infinitely more powerful and good, so that Amida always knows the best way to make us happy, good and wise. When we have faith in Him our lives in this world can become more meaningful and happy. Amida's Great Wisdom showed Him the best possible way to save all men from ignorance and suffering. So He cannot only help us in this life by giving us faith but also He gives us happy life forever in the Pure Land. It is easy to see why we should be very thankful to Amida's Great Wisdom.

Amida's Great Compassion

Amida loves all living beings with a love so deep and so strong that it is beyond our understanding. This love is called Great Compassion because it has no limit and never fails. Amida's only purpose is to save all beings and He has promised to work for all of us until we have attained Buddhahood. Isn't this a really Great Compassion?

Now you might think that Amida would, love us most when we are good, but not so much when we are bad. However, Amida loves us with Great Compassion and that means His love is always complete and strong no matter what we do. If we are bad, Amida is very sorry for us because He knows we are ignorant and weak. But He loves us just the same because He knows we need help even more when we are bad. When we are good, Amida is very happy for us because we are close to Him. When we are bad, Amida suffers for us and because of His Great Compassion He tries to bring us closer to Him. It is like a mother who protects her baby with her own life when there is danger. That is the kind of love which is more pure in Amida so we call it Great Compassion.

Amida's Great Power

We need Amida's Great Power because we are not strong enough to go to the Pure Land through our own strength. No matter how hard we may try we just cannot make enough good karma to take us to Amida's Pure Land. The more we study the teachings of Buddha, the clearer and firmer will be our trust in Amida, knowing that only He can save us. We also know that we can trust completely and wholeheartedly in Amida because His Great Power will never stop working until all beings are in the Pure Land.

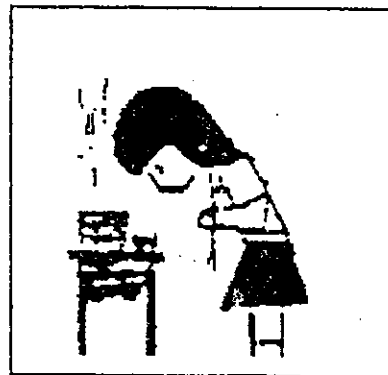
GRATITUDE

We express our gratitude by saying, "thank you so much" to anyone who is kind to us. We, the Buddhists, thank the countless person's efforts to provide us food by means of gassho before and after meals. When we think that a single grain of rice has given its life to become our food, our hearts are filled with gratitude. We are thankful for the boundless love and compassion of Amida Buddha that surrounds us.

There are many ways to be thankful. Cross out the ones that do not belong on the list.

A Buddhist Child...

- Is thankful to parents, friends, teachers, and all.
- Is thankful to Amida Buddha.
- Is friendly to all children.
- Is mean and rough.
- Smiles.
- Hurts pets and destroys toys through carelessness.
- Wastes food.
- Loves the beauty in nature.
- Come to Dharma School.
- Plays when it is time to work.
- Cares for and likes others.



The Four Gratitudes

WE ARE THANKFUL TO OUR PARENTS FOR
THEIR LOVING CARE FOR US.

WE ARE THANKFUL TO OUR FRIENDS AND ALL
OTHER LIFE FOR THEIR HELP IN PROVIDING
FOR OUR WELL BEING.

WE ARE THANKFUL TO OUR COUNTRY FOR ITS
BELIEF IN FREEDOM FOR ALL PEOPLES.

WE ARE THANKFUL TO THE THREE TREASURES
FOR SHOWING US THE WAY TO BE BORN INTO
AMIDA'S PURE LAND.

NAMU AMIDA BUTSU

The Four Gratuities

I. Introduction to teachers

- A. At the primary level, in order for the children to develop an understanding of the Four Gratuities, it is important for them to become involved with projects and discussions so that the feeling of gratitude can be experienced.
- B. The Four Gratuities
 1. Gratitude to our parents—for the loving care of us.
 2. Gratitude to friends and all other life—without whose help we could not live.
 3. Gratitude to our country—because it allows freedom for everyone.
 4. Gratitude to the Three Treasures—for showing us the way to Amida's Pure Land.

II. Discussing The Four Gratuities with children

- A. What does "Gratitude" mean? It means to be thankful.
- B. How many ways do you know how to say thank you?
 1. In English, we say "thank you."
In Spanish, we say "gracias."
In Japanese, we say "arigato."
 2. The words may sound different but the feelings they convey are all the same. It is a way we express gratitude for something that is done for us.
- C. What is the Buddhist way to say "thank you?" Namu Amida Butsu
- D. There are Four Gratuities in Buddhism that are very important and that I want to share with you. (teacher note: may be helpful to write on a chart)

THE FOUR GRATITUDES

WE ARE THANKFUL TO OUR PARENTS FOR
THEIR LOVING CARE OF US.

WE ARE THANKFUL TO OUR FRIENDS AND ALL
OTHER LIFE FOR THEIR HELP IN PROVIDING
FOR OUR WELL BEING.

WE ARE THANKFUL TO OUR COUNTRY FOR ITS
BELIEF IN FREEDOM FOR ALL PEOPLES.

WE ARE THANKFUL TO THE THREE TREASURES
FOR SHOWING US THE WAY TO AMIDA'S PURE
LAND.

NAMU AMIDA BUTSU

Gratitude



GRATITUDE TO PARENTS

The attitude of respect for family life and parents is to be nurtured as the basis for his/her later development as a human being, citizen and Buddhist.



GRATITUDE TO ALL LIFE

The attitude of appreciation for life and non-injury of living beings is to be cultivated as the first step in developing character and personality, in becoming a real human being.

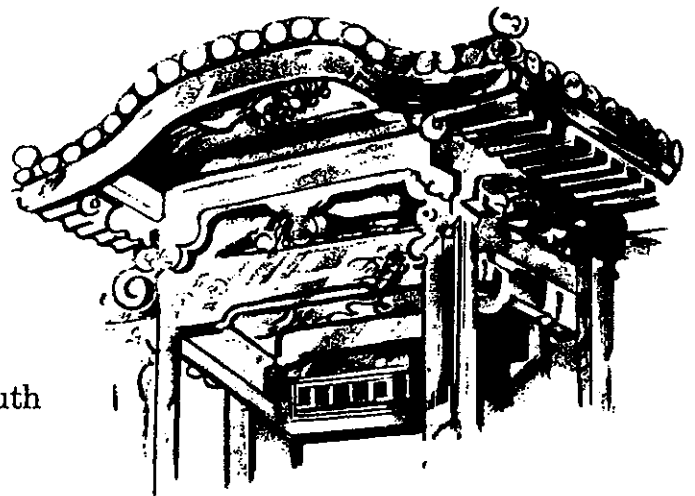


GRATITUDE TO COUNTRY

To be taught the meaning, role and responsibility of being a citizen in a given society. From the attitude of this gratitude there arises concern for the welfare of the country and its proper functioning, the development of a real citizen.

GRATITUDE TO BUDDHA, DHARMA, SANGHA

The appreciation for the Three Treasures is the source of the spiritual development. The Buddhist grows in spirituality as he/she grows in the gratitude to Buddha; the light of compassion who is with us in the Nembutsu; gratitude to Dharma, the truth of life which is the source of timeless peace; gratitude to Sangha, the men/women who selflessly devote their time and effort to spreading the teachings so we may share in its wisdom.



Gratitude

Once upon a time lived a woodsman. He went into the woods to gather dead twigs and bundled them for kindling wood. He peddled them in a nearby town. With the earnings he bought food and clothing.

In front of his house there flowed a beautiful stream. He cleaned the rice and the vegetable in the crystal clear water before cooking. He never threw away the left-over food because he could not waste it knowing that countless sacrifices were made to provide food for him. He took the left-over food to the stream and fed it to fish and crabs which dwelled in this beautiful stream. He fed them so frequently that when they heard his foot steps, they came out of their hiding and greeted him.

One day when he was working in the woods, he came across a huge viper. He jumped and ran away, but it chased after him. He ran all the way home and looked for a good hiding place. Fortunately, he found a huge barrel. He turned it over and hid in it, but the viper found him. He wrapped his long body around the barrel and began to crush it with all its might. As the barrel started to crack, the woodcutter began to tremble with fear.

Fishes and crabs came out of their hidings when they heard the unusually disturbed foot steps of their kind friend and found this dreadful scene. They thought that this was the time to save the life of their kind friend. A swarm of crabs came to the shore to help the woodsman. With their sharp claws, the crabs cut the viper to pieces. Thus, they saved the life of the kind woodsman.

We express our gratitude by saying "thank you so much" to anyone who is kind to us. We, the Buddhists, thank the countless persons' efforts to provide us food by means of gassho before and after meals. When we think that a single grain of rice has given its life to become our food, our hearts are filled with gratitude. When we realize that we are surrounded by Lord Amida-Buddha's boundless love and compassion, we must thank Him by reciting the Nembutsu.

St. Rennyō, the eighth Abbot of Nishi Hongwanji, said, "Buddhism teaches us the importance of thanksgiving."

If we are able to lead a life of thankfulness, we may be able to create a much more peaceful world.

Buddhist Dharma Lesson 4th Grade

A BUDDHIST CHILD

A child is like a loose thread in a sweater. Now, no one wants to be like a loose thread in a sweater, does he? Do you know why? Because once we start to pull the thread, it keeps pulling out and pulling out. If we started to pull the loose thread in the sleeve, soon, there wouldn't be any sleeve. If we keep going, in a short time we'd only have a pile of yarn and no sweater at all.

A smart person who finds a loose thread will stop right away and tie a little knot or get someone to mend the place where it is starting to unravel. In this way, the sweater can be worn for a long time.

What has this to do with a little child? Well, when we are very young, there are many things we have to learn. For example, we learn to tie our shoes or to buckle them. Otherwise, we'd be going around all day with loose shoes slipping around on our feet. We have to learn to comb our hair or we'd be going around with hair hanging in our faces. We have to learn to use a knife and fork and chopsticks or we'll be spilling food all over the table.

In the same way, a Buddhist child has to learn the best way to think, speak and act, so as to live nicely and kindly among all kinds of other children and adults. A Buddhist child LISTENS CAREFULLY AT SUNDAY SCHOOL.

A BUDDHIST CHILD IS THANKFUL

What is the very best way to prove that our Buddhist children are thankful, as we say?

We don't expect a Buddhist child to talk about it, it's just something he has in his heart. You know the wonderful feeling at school, when you get a paper back and it has a mark on it from teacher reading 100% or A? You know the wonderful feeling when it's cold and windy and rainy outside and you just watch it from INSIDE? Or when you see your little pet racing to meet you when you get home from school? Or the warm feeling you feel when you look up to the altar of Amida Buddha? Or when you go someplace special with the family and have a fine time? These are ways of feeling thankful and happy.

Oh, but there is another step...it is expressing (proving) our warm feeling of being thankful. The Buddhist Reader told of many ways to be thankful, so for this lesson, I'll just tell you ONE.

IT'S TO BE A SMALL BODHISATTVA. A Bodhisattva. That is one who really likes others. One who cares for others. There are hundreds of small ways to care for others.

A BUDDHIST CHILD...

Is thankful to parents, friends, Senseis and all.

Is thankful to Amida Buddha.

Comes to Dharma School every Sunday, unless ill.

Is friendly to all children.

Is helpful, at school, at home, at play, at church.

Smiles.

Is kind and gentle.

Takes care of his pets and never destroys his toys thru carelessness.

Loves the beautiful in nature.

Looks about to see the sky, the trees, the other living things.

Knows there is a time to play, a time to work, a time to study and a time to remember Amida Buddha (The time to remember Amida Buddha is ALWAYS).

Learn all he can about the Buddhist Teachings.

Is reverent.

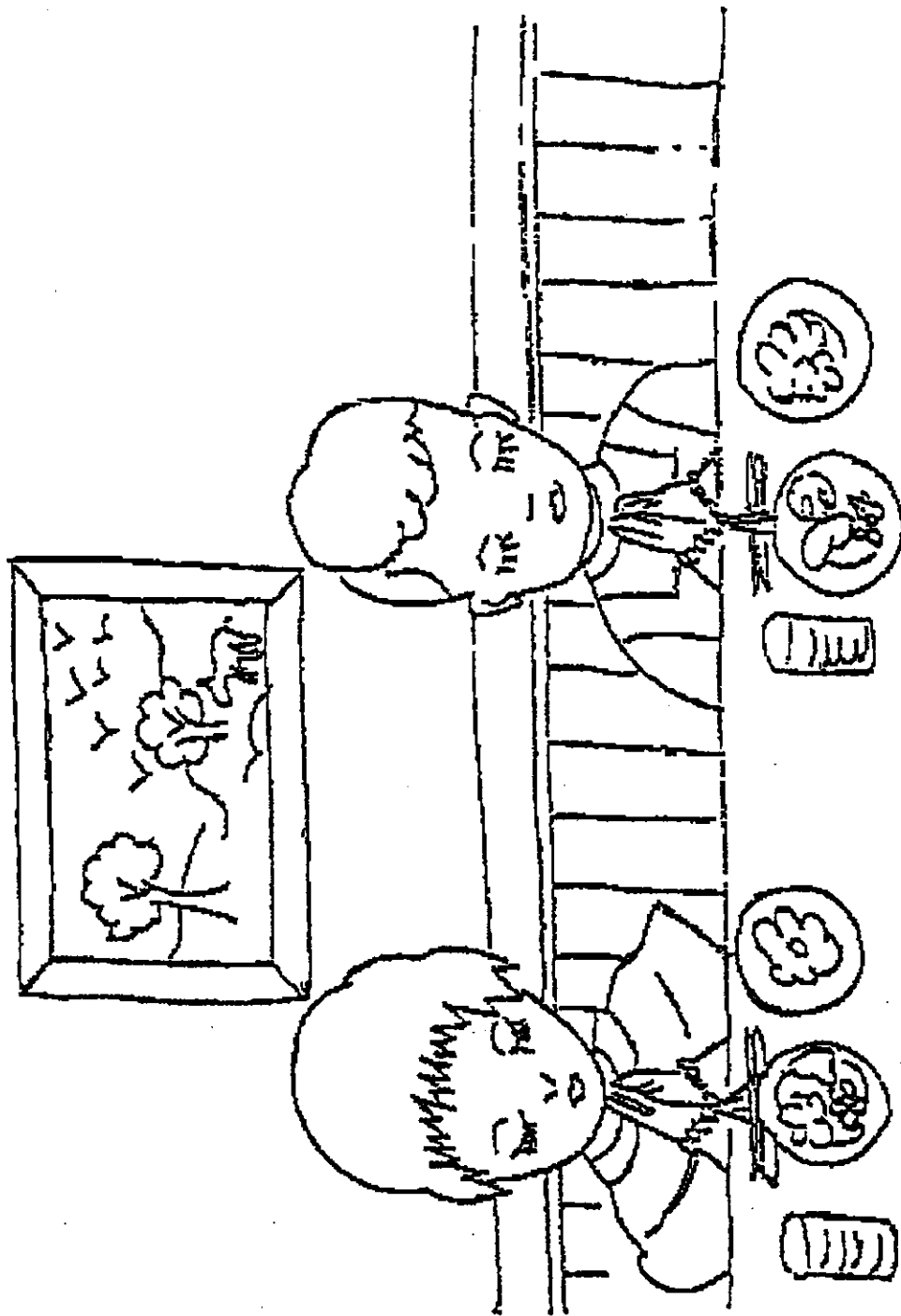
Words of Thanksgiving

Leader: We are truly grateful for this wonderful food.

Everybody: We wish to share it with all beings. As we partake of this food, let us remember Amida Buddha's Compassion, which surrounds all forms of life.

**Namu Amida Butsu.
Itadakimasu.**





Lets us always remember to say
"Itadakimasu" and "Gochisosama"
(In appreciation for our meals)

THE GOLDEN CHAIN OF LOVE

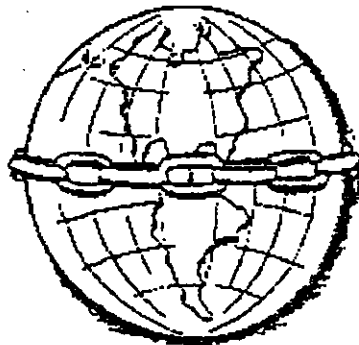
Fill in the blanks.

I'm a _____ in _____ Golden Chain of
_____ that stretches around the _____. I must
_____ my link bright and strong.

I will try to be _____ and _____ to every
_____ thing and _____ all who are _____
than myself.

I will try to think _____ and _____ thoughts,
to say pure and beautiful _____, and to do pure and
beautiful _____, knowing that on what I do
now _____ not only on my _____ but also
those of _____.

May every _____ in Amida Buddha's _____
Chain of _____ become _____ and
_____, and may we all _____ perfect _____.



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. Discerning 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.