

Gotan-ye - Life of Shinran Shonen

By: Rev. Shojo Honda

Religious movements in Europe brought about the Reformation. This was in the 16th century. In Japan, the Kamakura period, from the 13th to the 14th centuries, can be compared to the time of the Reformation in Europe. Japanese Buddhism that arose in the Kamakura period had a great influence on Japanese thought and culture in later years. Of all the Buddhist denominations, Shin Buddhism, founded by Shinran Shonin, and Zen Buddhism are the most representative ones. Zen, on the one hand, teaches “release liberation”, and Shin Buddhism, on the other, expounds “salvation” by Amida Buddha.

Shinran lived in the Kamakura period. He was born on May 21, 1173. Shinran’s time was historically epoch-making. It was when the aristocratic society of the Heian Period (794–1185) crumbled to pave the way for the samurai-dominated culture of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). This time, also, opened an era of internecine warfare and social chaos, unmatched by any other period in the history of Japan.

About 15 years before Shinran was born, the Hôgen and Heiji rebellions took place. When the rebellions ended, the Taira Clan, also known as the Heike, had established its power. Then a bitter conflict with the rival Minamoto Clan, also known as the Genji, began struggling for military and political dominance. All human feeling and sensibilities were cast aside, and kin fought against kin. Men with political ambition and material greed abounded, lawlessness and disorder pervaded the society.

In such a disruptive period, those who suffered were the masses, their houses burned to the ground. Seven years before Shinran was born, 1,000 houses were destroyed, 2 years later, 3,000 houses were burned in Kyoto. One-third of the capital city had been reduced

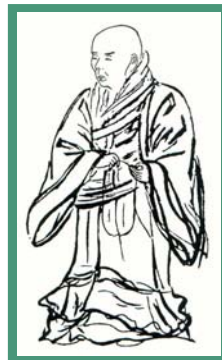
to ruin. Numberless people were killed, their crops and farmland were trampled upon, and their food and clothing were ransacked. All they could do was escape with their lives, and they lived under constant fear and tension.

When Shinran was 4, the capital was devastated by an earthquake, a terrible fire, and a tornado. A great many people died as the result of these calamities. Not only that, famine and epidemic followed. Then three years later, the same area was hit by another earthquake. Kamo-no-chomei, who witnessed these events, wrote the following in his essay, *Hojoki*, that “the terror of hell could not surpass all this.” He also recorded some of the horrible things that he had heard, such as a baby sucking on its mother’s breast, not knowing that she had died. A count of the dead bodies in the street of

Kyoto by a monk of Nin’naji Temple recorded 42,300 in two months in the capital alone. The suffering of people living in this age of chaos and natural calamities was beyond description.

Learning about such historical and social conditions in the Kamakura period is very significant to understanding the teachings of Shinran. In later years, he says in the *Tan’nisho*: “Under the influence of our karmic past, we human beings will do anything.” Without knowing the social conditions of Shinran’s days, we

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Living in the Dharma, Confusedly - Boundless Sangha

By: Anna Tecson

Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, founded by the former Tendai Japanese monk Shinran Shonin, spread from Japan in the 19th century when Japanese immigrants began to settle in Hawaii, the continental United States, Canada, Mexico, and South America. Jodo Shinshu is one of the oldest Buddhist traditions in this country with one of the largest populations, and the year 2011 will mark the 750th memorial of Shinran Shonin.

Still, a recurring topic of analysis and discussion is a measurable decline in participation and attendance in the dozens of Jodo Shinshu temples in this country. Modern issues facing Jodo Shinshu temples include a population that had once been so active and instrumental in the vibrancy of the Sangha that is now aging and not so active. A large segment of the succeeding generations have become involved with other religions or have formed other ties through lifestyle, education or marriage. Beyond individual Sangha membership, it might be reasonable to speculate some degree of doctrinal and philosophical variances among our Jodo Shinshu institutions—the Hongwanji in Japan, Buddhist Churches of America in California, Buddhist Churches of Canada—relative to cultural diversities and the subtleties of language and translation.

The Buddhist Churches of America has begun hosting a series of seminars on temple leadership, which address many of the modern issues facing our Jodo Shinshu Sanghas. I attended a seminar recently at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley, California, and for an entire weekend, with the benefit and enjoyment of meeting other Jodo Shinshu Buddhists from several other temples, we explored many of the shifting dynamics of our Sanghas with openness and candor.

The problem of shrinking attendance and membership dominated much of the discussion, and is a concern that all religious entities continue to address. At its bleakest, some caretakers routinely open and close temples that sit empty and struggle with holding monthly services. Many Sanghas suffer from the lack the guidance and wisdom of ordained ministers, precious teachers who have devoted their entire lives to sharing the Dharma. Some temples must deal with multiple-language barriers.

In contrast to the issues of shrinking Sanghas, diverse populations continually gravitate toward our temples. Many of us—those born into Jodo Shinshu and converts—must span the breadth of cultural variances,

an effort vastly rewarding but at times confusing. Many converts have their own lengthy, at times epic, religious histories. So, in addition to revering their lives along the Jodo Shinshu path, many must at some point also reconcile and make peace with their past. Many Buddhist converts began with a broad study of Buddhism, an eclectic, sometimes pop-culture mix of various traditions. From there, through a delicate balance of effort and letting go, they might eventually realize what distinguishes Jodo Shinshu and, on so many levels, truly experience the depth of the Nembutsu practice, its recitation, the true entrusting of power beyond our limiting sense of self, the boundless gratitude. Beyond these issues, some Buddhist converts find themselves following a religious life completely separate from their families, their spouses, and their peer groups and might struggle between feelings of isolation and a reluctance to commit. Still others embark on a trajectory of eager, fervent devotion, then departure.

Other accounts reflected the kinds of behaviors indicative of our human tendencies associated with any group dynamic, of power struggles and with-holding of knowledge, of polarizing interpersonal conflicts and tensions.

Some temples have already spanned the entire range of experiences I described and grown beyond to become vibrant, lively Sanghas that continue to foster the Dharma. Clergy and lay persons actively support one another. As more and more lay persons share their personal experiences by giving Dharma talks, ministers share their lifetime's accumulation of knowledge and insight to all ages and levels of understanding. Informal discussion groups, book clubs, recreational activities, and sincere, active outreach continue to strengthen our fellowship. Some temples, with so few of the resources we have here at Ekoji, hold the sparsest services with a few taped Dharma messages played repeatedly, still welcome an eager, enthusiastic Sangha. Clearly, the potential for our lives and many others to experience the Dharma can flourish. Individual temples, through changing circumstances, will at times be severely limited. Still, just like our predecessors and those that will follow us, people hold the same yearnings, aspirations, and ideals that continue to draw us together. Collectively, our Sanghas comprise boundless potential. I would encourage fel-

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wouldn't understand what he was talking about. How can one maintain a pure mind or any serenity under such conditions?

Shinran was born and lived in such a time and in such a world. According to one legend, when Shinran was very young, his mother died. When he was 9, his father sent Shinran to En'ryakuji Temple at Hiei Mountain to make him a monk. Shinran had three brothers. All of them were sent to different temples. Perhaps their father could not support his boys, for his family was one of necessitous members of Fujiwara aristocracy.

Shinran studied Tendai teachings and its practices for 20 years. However, in the end, after all his endeavors, Shinran had big doubts about the study and practices that he undertook at Mt. Hiei. To Shinran, studying Buddhism was just the interpretation of texts

and nothing but the accumulation of knowledge of doctrines that had no concern to his inner quest. As to the daily practice, it was just chanting Nembutsu while mentally visualizing the image of Buddha. As a matter of fact, most of the monks believed that they could attain Enlightenment by their own Nembutsu chanting power. After 20 years of experience, he realized that this is not the way to attain Buddhahood, not the way to find freedom from suffering. Thus, finally, Shinran left Mt. Hiei and came down to the city of Kyoto. He was 29.

Let's look at the religious world during this time. The great majority of monks and priests devoted their energy to achieve worldly success through their connections with those in power. When aristocrats and warriors sought the protection of the Buddha and native deities in order to fulfill their ambitions, then monks and

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December Board of Directors Meeting

The Ekoji Buddhist Temple Board of Directors met on December 9, 2007. Attending were Erick Isshi, Evan Cantwell, Mark LaWall, Greg Nakamura, Rich Wolford, and Anna Tecson.

The November Board of Directors meeting minutes were approved. The Board reviewed and approved the Treasurer's report, which included allowances for the annual Minister's gift (Orei). Evan Cantwell is heading up the Membership Committee.

Discussion focused on funding and facilities. The Sangha must reach a consensus on a plan, and the next step would be to meet with architects. The Numata Foundation will support a facility-wide renovation.

Calendar for January includes the 750th anniversary of Shinran Shonin, and Ekoji will host a potluck; Anna Tecson suggested a guided historical walk through the meditation garden, chronicling Shinran's life.

In addition to managing the Calendar of Events, Greg Nakamura will head and coordinate rental of Ekoji facilities.

The Board will actively solicit a consensus of its Sangha members regarding funding of the Jodo Shinshu Center. Rich Wolford will prepare a survey that will be distributed online and published in the Kalavinka. Board members discussed the on-going issues of disparity of support among the Sanghas and the remaining debt of the center in light of the many exist-

ing and future benefits of national center and its role in fostering Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. Weighing in on Ekoji's responsibilities to a national effort, the board evaluated the immediate, local needs of its Sangha, which are primarily supporting its resident minister, attending to the maintenance and renovations of the facilities, maintaining its ability to be self-sustaining, and offering programs that benefit the Sangha.

New Board Member Evan Cantwell was welcomed. Evan is actively pursuing avenues for sharing the Dharma by compiling a collection of recorded Dharma talks from Ekoji services and exploring the possibilities of netcasting Dharma talks as well. Both Greg Nakamura and Evan Cantwell expressed their support of Bud Uyeda in these efforts.

Evan has offered to actively support the content of the Kalavinka. The editors of the Kalavinka hope to publish more of Evan's photos and interviews in its upcoming issues. Anna Tecson will solicit advertising.

Rich Wolford will organize an estate planning seminar in the Spring of 2008.

Greg Nakamura and John Grimes will schedule a professional, end-of-year cleaning, and Anna Tecson will continue to seek volunteers from the Sangha for regular cleaning efforts.

The formal installation of the new board will take place January 6, and the January board meeting is scheduled for January 13.

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priests frantically sought to serve them, performing magic-religious rituals and prayers on their behalf. History books also show that the monk-soldiers of great monastic centers of Mt. Hiei and Nara made frequent and violent demands on the Imperial court whenever they were dissatisfied with an official edict, or wanted policies to be made in their favor.

During that time, in the city, a great master of the Pure Land School, Honen, was teaching the way of deliverance for all men and women, young and old, whether good or evil, so long as they trusted the Vow of Amida. Having listened to Honen's teachings, Shinran's long suffering, struggle, and frustrations were relieved and he professed the joy of salvation. He became a disciple of Honen Shonin. Shinran realized the limit of one's self-power.

Soon after that, persecution against the newly formed Pure Land School by politically powerful rival Buddhist sects increased. The monks of En'yakuji Temple at Mt. Hiei and Kobukuji Temple in Nara petitioned the Imperial government to prohibit Nembutsu practice. In February 1207, the Imperial Court forcibly banished Honen to the remote Tosa Province, and the Imperial authority revoked Shinran's priesthood and his Buddhist name so that he became a layperson. In later years, he said in *Tan'nisho: Our world is the burning house of transience, hence all things are entirely empty and nonsense, and not true. The Nembutsu alone is true.*

Four years later, in 1211, Shinran was pardoned at the age of 39. Although pardoned, he remained in Echigo for three more years on his own. During this time he married a daughter of a manor keeper. When Shinran was 42, he and his family moved to the Kanto area, that is the eastern part of Japan. For 20 years he stayed within the Kanto area, going from place to place teaching the Primal Vow of Amida. Shinran always taught people that, "no matter how shallow your faith may be, you will be assured of deliverance if you devotedly rely on Amida's Primal Vow, because of the inconceivable power of his Vow." In 1234, at the age of 62, Shinran returned to Kyoto to finish his lifework, *Kyo-gyo-shin-sho (Teaching, Practice, Faith, and Enlightenment)*, which describes the basic doctrine of Jodo Shinshu.

At age 83, his residence was destroyed by fire. The family did not have a home to live in together, so Shinran's wife, Yeshin'ni, and their two children returned

to Echigo province. Shinran remained in Kyoto to continue his book, his lifework, *Kyo-gyo-Shin-sho*, to which he put his heart and spirit. During that period, another prohibition of the Nembutsu practice was passed, this time by the Kamakura Bakufu. Public officials burned the woodblocks that were used to print the books of the Pure Land Teachings, and many other books as well. Although Shinran completed the *Kyo-gyo-Shin-sho* at around age 75, he continued writing until the age of 86 and completed several other works.

At the age of 84, a great tragedy came upon Shinran. He had to disown his first son, Zenran. Zenran had been sent by Shinran to lead and advise the Nembutsu followers in the Kanto area, but he had begun to create problems by causing heterodoxies. In a letter to his son written in 1256, Shinran expressed himself in the following way: "Now, I am no longer your father and no longer think of you as my son. This, I swear to the Three Treasures. Deep is my sorrow." Shinran's strong action against his son in this incident, shows his pure character that sought to reject all things for the sake of the true and real teachings.

In November 1262, Shinran became ill. His daughter, Kakushin'ni, came from Echigo to take care of her father. In the following year, on January 16, 1262, at the age of 90, Shinran returned to the Pure Land to which he relied upon with his whole heart and life.

Through his 90 years of life, Shinran did not establish a single temple. He did not desire to do so. Despite the fact that Shinran had some 100,000 Nembutsu followers in the Kanto area, he said, "I, Shinran, do not have a single disciple of my own. The reason is, if I should lead others to say Nembutsu by my own effort, I might call them my disciples. But, how arrogant it is to claim my disciples when they recite Nembutsu through the power of Amida Buddha.

Shinran's last request was that his body be thrown to the Kamo River, so it might feed the fish. He was a person who wore paper-made shirts. He was poor but upright. He did not believe in any miracles or superstitions during his life. He never prayed for a divine favor. He never obtained any religious position or honor. He lived as a plain, ordinary man who enjoyed the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. I believe that, of all the Japanese priests and monks, Shinran's way of life was the closest to that of Gautama Buddha himself.

Namo Amida Butsu

In Gassho

November/December 2007

Anthony Trojanowski and Julianna Bickus
 Charlottte Bridges
 Shojo Honda
 Mary Okamoto
 Jon A. Sjogren
 Shelly Kaufman-Young
 Paula Lucas
 Kathleen Kelly
 Emily Ihara
 Ron and Fujie Ohata
 Noriko Hunter

Lillian Kashihara
 Kenichi Kuwabara
 Josh and Gini Dietrich

Pledges and Dues

Herbert Oie
 Wayne Minami

In Memory of Tom and Mary Murakami
 Raymond Murakami



84,000 Thoughts

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low Sangha members to expand their perspective of Sangha. Take moment to browse the many temple newsletters we receive here at Ekoji and delve into the vast resources on-line of in-depth discussion of topics in Jodo Shinshu. Let's foster inter-generational activities to honor our predecessors' mission and nurture succession. Let's establish pen pal networks for our Dharma school students, our future Sangha leaders, who might very well form lasting associations with these peers through college and profession. Attend inter-Sangha events, such as the Eastern Buddhist League Conferences, take the train to New York and visit the American Buddhist Studies Center for a weekend seminar, when traveling look for a Jodo Shinshu temple and pay a visit. Introduce yourselves and invite these *Ondogyo*, or fellow travelers on the path of the Nembutsu, to visit us here at Ekoji to attend a service or one of our many social events, discussions, and seminars. Plan a trip to California to visit the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. Make that pilgrimage to the Hongwanji in Kyoto. From my few inter-Sangha experiences to date, I have made fond acquaintances from coast to coast, and I wish you all the same.

Most assuredly, we must continue to support our individual temples. As our concept of Sangha expands, all the more reason we must work together and care for and maintain our temple and grounds, share our many talents and skills, and encourage camaraderie as we welcome visitors from near and far. For many of us, Ekoji will always be like a home, which we actively maintain and serve. At the seminar I had the pleasure of meeting Liat Parker, from the temple in Spokane, Washington. Only a few weeks later, she passed through D.C. Stemming from her former acquaintances with Ekoji Sangha members, took the time to visit us at Ekoji, and I was eager to welcome her to our home Sangha. As part of the entire interconnected sphere of our religious experience, we begin a personal, individual spiritual practice. As our realization expands, we become active, contributing members of our Sangha and beyond that recognize our service to the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—beyond our own individual fulfillment, beyond walls and distances, to share our faith and gratitude with all.

Namo Amida Butsu



January is *Hoonkoo*—a memorial month of Shinran Shōnin, one of the biggest events of the year for Jodo Shinshu Buddhists. Ekoji will conduct an annual Hoonkoo on January 20, 2007, at 11:00 a.m. Honda Sensei will discuss the life of Shinran Shonin and give a historical background of Kamakura period in which he lived. Ekoji Buddhist Temple will host a potluck luncheon following service. All are welcome.

Center for Buddhist Education

2008 Programs at the Jodo Shinshu Center

JANUARY 15-16 JSC HO-ONKO SERVICE This is the most important service for Jodo Shinshu Buddhists. The focus will be on Shinran Shonin's life and his message. The Ho-onko eve service January 15 will feature many speakers.

JANUARY 29-31 MINISTERS CONTINUING EDUCATION Continuing education sessions for BCA ministers with similar years of service in the BCA ministry.

FEBRUARY 2-3 "NEW-B'S" "Crossing Over to Shin Buddhism" a weekend seminar for those members who were not born into Buddhist families but came to find the Nembutsu teachings. Guest Dharma message will be given by Rev. Don Castro with participation from other ministers who are "New-B's themselves. [New-B's =Newly Buddhist].

FEBRUARY 6 and 20 EVENING PUBLIC LECTURES Guest lecturer to be announced.

MARCH 5 and 19 EVENING PUBLIC LECTURES Guest lecturer to be announced.

MARCH 11-13 MINISTERS CONTINUING EDUCATION Continuing education sessions for BCA ministers with similar years of service in the BCA ministry.

MARCH 28-29 TEMPLE LEADERSHIP SEMINAR A weekend seminar geared for temple leaders to strengthen their understanding of Jodo Shinshu, temple leadership and their responsibilities as leaders of the Sangha.

APRIL 4-6 SEMINAR FOR YOUNG ADULTS (post-college to 35 years old) Seminar geared toward the young working membership with special emphasis on their needs, desires and interests as young adult Buddhists. (TBD)

APRIL 17-20 MINISTERS ASSISTANT PROGRAM (MAPQUEST Group II) Continuing educational seminar for recognized ministers' assistants in Group #2.

APRIL 24-27 MINISTERS ASSISTANT PROGRAM (MAPQUEST Group I) Continuing education seminar for ministers' assistants in Group #1.

MAY 10 JAPANESE NEMBUTSU SEMINAR A day-long seminar for Japanese-speaking members.

MAY 13-15 MINISTERS CONTINUING EDUCATION SEMINAR Continuing education sessions for BCA ministers with similar years of service in the BCA ministry.

JUNE 27-29 PACIFIC SEMINAR A revival of the long-respected annual BCA seminar which was originally held in Asilomar on the beautiful California coast. The new Berkeley version will be held at the JSC Center, co-sponsored by IBS, and will feature several respected Shin teachers.

AUGUST 4 - 8 EARLY MORNING MEDITATION Come stay at the JSC to experience morning Buddhist activities together with other Dharma friends and families. Then enjoy the remaining time to explore the sites in the San Francisco Bay Area.

AUGUST 15-17 ABC's OF DHARMA SCHOOL TEACHERS' RETREAT A continuing program organized and staffed by professional and experienced educators who will guide new and dedicated Dharma School teachers committed to serving their Dharma Schools.

SEPTEMBER 5-6 MINISTERS ASSISTANT PROGRAM HELD IN THE EASTERN DISTRICT Special program expressly for ministers assistants serving at temples in the BCA's Eastern District. Location to be announced.

SEPTEMBER 9-11 MINISTERS CONTINUING EDUCATION SEMINAR Continuing education sessions for BCA ministers with similar years of service in the BCA ministry.

SEPTEMBER 10,17,24 EVENING PUBLIC LECTURES Guest lecturer to be announced.

SEPTEMBER 27-28 TEMPLE LEADERSHIP SEMINAR A weekend seminar geared for temple leaders to strengthen their understanding of Jodo Shinshu, temple leadership and their responsibilities as leaders of the Sangha.

OCTOBER 4 JAPANESE LANGUAGE SEMINAR A day-long seminar for Japanese-speaking members.

OCTOBER 8, 15, 22 EVENING PUBLIC LECTURES Guest lecturer to be announced.

OCTOBER 9-12 MINISTERS ASSISTANTS PROGRAM (MAPQUEST Group I) Continuing education seminar for ministers assistants in Group #1.

OCTOBER 16-19 MINISTERS ASSISTANT PROGRAM (MAPQUEST Group II) Continuing education seminar for ministers assistants in Group #2.

NOVEMBER 1 BABY BOOMERS SEMINAR Annual Dharma seminar for those members born in the "baby boomer years" (ages 45-60.)

NOV. 4-6 MINISTERS CONTINUING EDUCATION SEMINAR Continuing education sessions for BCA ministers with similar years of service in the BCA ministry.

JODO SHINSHU CORRESPONDENCE COURSE: Headquartered at the Jodo Shinshu Center, this detailed and concise correspondence course sponsored by the Hongwanji will be available worldwide to English-speaking Dharma seekers. Program will start sometime in 2008.

BCA Center for Buddhist Education
Phone 510-809-1460 FAX 510-809-1462 Email director@cbe-bca.org
www.cbe-bca.org

Ekoji Calendar of Events- January 2008

Services

Sundays, 11:00 a.m.

January Service Dates:

January 1, New Years Day, Gordon Bermant
(Potluck following service)

January 6, Rev. Kobata

January 13, TBA

January 20, Rev. Honda, 750th Anniverary Shinran Shonen
(Potluck following service)

January 27, TBA

Children's Dharma School

Service Sundays, 10:00 a.m.

Classes Sundays, 11:00 a.m.

Adult Dharma Discussion

Sundays, 10:00 a.m., Sangha Hall



Kalavinka

Managing Editor:

Anna C. Tecson

Assistant Editors/Layout:

Ken Nakamura

Andrea A. Walter

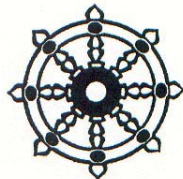
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EKOJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE

6500 Lake Haven Lane
Fairfax Station, VA 22039

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