

Preparatory Event for the 2023 Celebrations at the Shinshū Honbyō  
750th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Honbyō

Message from the Chief Administrator

1. About the Preparatory Event

Greetings to you all. Thank you for joining us today at the Preparatory Event for the 850th Celebration of Shinran Shōnin's Birth and the 800th Anniversary of the Establishment of Jōdo Shinshū at the Shinshū Honbyō. This service also commemorates the 750th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Honbyō (Memorial Hall).

The novel coronavirus pandemic continues to grip the world with fear and grief. Restrictions continue in our communications and interactions with each other. Those restrictions have made me realize that I had taken my relationships with others for granted. Despite such a difficult situation, we have received continued support of our activities for preserving the teaching lineage and maintaining the Shinshū Honbyō from all of you. I take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude for your support with utmost respect.

As you know, we will observe the bicentennial celebrations for our spiritual forebear Shinran Shōnin in 2023. We must regard these major services as important opportunities to create a more future-oriented denomination together. By doing so, we can share the teaching of the *nenbutsu* clarified by Shinran Shōnin with as many people as possible. Our Shinshū Honbyō has been maintained and supported by countless numbers of *nenbutsu* followers in history. Today, from the Shinshū Honbyō in Kyoto, we are sharing the Preparatory Event for the 2023 Celebrations with you so that we can rediscover the meaning of the birth of Shinran Shōnin as well as of the establishment of Jōdo Shinshū.

2. The Wish in the Celebration Projects (*Kyōsan jigyō*)

(1) What We Are Encouraged to Awaken to through the Word “*Kyōsan*”

Shinran Shōnin composed many hymns (*wasans*) to praise Prince Shōtoku (574–622) for his effort in spreading the Buddhist teachings in Japan. In one of those hymns, the Shōnin uses the term “*kyōki hōsan*” (to rejoice and praise) to express his deep appreciation for the contributions by the prince. In one of his works titled *Ichinen tanen mon'i* (Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling), he explains the meaning of the character “*kyō*” as follows:

“*Kyō*” is to rejoice at having attained what one shall attain.

I understand that the term “*kyōsan*” stands for our rejoicing at realizing the fact that the universal working of Amida Tathāgata's wisdom and compassion to liberate all people has reached me through history, which leads to my innermost wish to repay my indebtedness.

Through the encounter with the teaching of the *nenbutsu*, we have been able to discover the true meaning of having been born as human beings. I think Shinran Shōnin uses the word “*kyō*” (to rejoice) to express his gratification for that discovery.

When I reflect on this, it brings up so many memories of people who have nurtured and guided me in my life. At the same time, though, I realize this reflection always poses a fundamental question to me, “Do I truly appreciate the teaching of the *nenbutsu*?”

We Shinshū followers have a tradition of daily practice of chanting the *Shōshinge* [which Shinran Shōnin composed]. In the *Shōshinge*, Shinran expresses his deepest gratitude toward the tradition that had transmitted Amida's vow [to liberate all beings] from India to the Shōnin in Japan.

In the midst of the turbulence of his time, he continued to listen to and understand Amida's vow and to share his understanding with people throughout his life. We wish to learn from the Shōnin's way of life which conveys the fundamental spirit of establishing Jōdo Shinshū.

## (2) The Present Age

What are the characteristics of the age we are living in?

There have been remarkable achievements in science and technology such as the advancement of information technology and artificial intelligence. We humans have tried to achieve even faster speeds, even more convenience, and even more comfort, and great achievements have been accomplished. However, such things have brought only materialistic and economic affluence to us. Many problems have come with those achievements.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Tōhoku Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011. We had planned to observe the 750th Memorial for Shinran Shōnin in Spring of that year. However, the disaster happened just prior to the observance. As a result, the event was changed to support the victims of the disaster. I participated in the gathering as a Shinshū follower. The disaster was a bitter reminder of the impermanent nature of our lives. I remember hearing the voices of the people in the affected areas who repeatedly said, "Please do not forget what happened here." I continue to be humbled by the significance of each encounter we experience in our lives.

After the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, a huge amount of radioactive material was released and many local residents were forced to evacuate their home towns. It can be said that those people are the victims of our pursuit of economic growth solely with the goal of attaining materialistic affluence in mind. We must remind ourselves of the fact that the reality of Fukushima was caused by our overconfidence in human knowledge and technology which represents the darkness of the human wisdom.

Since the novel coronavirus pandemic broke out last year, we have seen news reports in which infected people's identities were exposed through social media. They in turn became the target of abuse and slander. Even though further infections must be prevented, the people who have been infected should never be pushed out from our society or face any kind of discrimination.

In the past, our denomination blindly cooperated with the Japanese government's policy of forcibly isolating patients of Hansen's disease (epilepsy). That brought irreparable suffering not only to the patients but also to their families. We must bear in mind the grave mistakes we made in the past and do our best to turn negative experiences into positive ones, especially when people continue to suffer from the disease.

Today, it is easy for us to be connected with people around the world. However, a growing number of people are obsessed with the idea that they must be connected with someone at all times. At the same time, though, there is a growing trend to avoid human interactions among many people. Apparently, we seem to have connections worldwide more than ever before. But in reality, many of us are experience isolation and anxiety more than ever before. That is one of the major problems of our modern society. It has become even more necessary for us to realize that we are totally interconnected with each other in this world.

## (3) Rediscover Others as Fellow Seekers (*Dōbō*)—Learning from the Theme of the Celebrations

Then, what is the significance of the existence of our denomination in this modern age?

About 40 years ago, our denomination was confronted by an unprecedented problem generally known as "the crisis of our denomination." It was when the Constitution of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha (*shūken*), the supreme rules and regulations of our denomination, was amended by our fellow seekers who sincerely wished to restore our denomination to what it should be. In this new Constitution, it is clearly stated that the objective of our denomination is to realize a society based on the spirit of fellow seekers, fellow friends.

A society based on the spirit of fellow seekers is a society where we can discover all people as our true friends and establish true relationships with each other with mutual respect. In such relationships, there is no need to compare oneself with others through the lens of who is more noble or who is better.

Shinran Shōnin states in one of his letters as follows:

The signs of long years of reciting the Name of Amida and aspiring for Birth in the Pure Land appear as our realization of how bad our heart was. The realization enables us to turn around the focus of our heart and to establish truly warm (*nengoro*) relationships with our fellow seekers. Those are the signs of renouncing this world. You should fully understand this.

Rev. Shizuka Miyagi (1931–2008) explains about this letter as follows:

The word *nengoro* originally means the state of roots entangled with each other. All of us are living with roots put down deeply in this world and those roots are entangled with other people's roots. If I hurt someone, I hurt myself also. It also means that we can only be saved together. This is what Shinran Shōnin called the heart of *nengoro*. Nevertheless, we always put ourselves at the center of everything. Despite that, Shinran Shōnin says the heart of *nengoro* can be bestowed upon even such a person with such a self-centered mind. That is the sign of awakening through the recitation of Amida's Name. How grateful we are!

We humans are so fundamentally self-centered which result in excluding others at our convenience. We may even resort to suicide. That is the reality of our lives. But the teaching tells us that if we deeply realize the reality of ourselves through the *nenbutsu*, we can begin to live our lives based on a true understanding of the self. Therefore, Shinran Shōnin has always encouraged us to listen to our predecessors and to follow them on the path of awakening through reciting the Name of Amida.

Even if we are in the midst of isolation and anxiety, we can discover our true self through the teaching of the *nenbutsu* and rediscover others as our fellow seekers. That's what is needed most in our society today. Therefore, it can be said that the objective of our denomination is to share the teaching of the *nenbutsu* with as many people as we can.

The main theme we have selected for the 2021 Celebrations is “*Namu Amida Butsu—To Discover the Meaning of Being Born as Human Beings.*” It is our wish that this theme will provide us with the opportunity to reflect on such important matters.

### 3. For Further Development of the Celebration Projects (*Kyōsan jigyō*)

#### (1) Let Us Take This Opportunity to Reappreciate the Significance of Our Temples

The spiritual focus of all Shinshū followers is the Shinshū Honbyō, our mother temple in Kyoto. Our denomination also has regional head temples (*betsuin*), local temples and chapels throughout the country [also in the United States and in South America] for listening to the teaching of the *nenbutsu*. Each of those temples, having its roots firmly in their locales, has been part of the histories of their local communities.

However, in addition to the rapid changes in society as well as in our sense of values, we must admit that we have been so absorbed in attaining economic and materialistic wealth that we have neglected the importance of listening to the teaching [which may be the reason why our temple memberships have declined and the meaning of the existence of Buddhist temples in general have been questioned]. It is the time for us to deeply reflect on such issues. The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has exacerbated the situation and brought about even more problems to our temples and members.

However, if there is even one person who is confronted with difficulties in life, there is meaning in the existence of a Buddhist temple. Therefore, our denomination must treasure each one of our sangha members and each one of our temples. We must encourage mutual support of each other.

It is my wish that the 2023 Celebrations will be the opportunity to rediscover the significance of a temple's existence for all of us who have supported our temples.

## (2) The Basic Idea for the Celebrations

In this modern age when a growing number of people identify themselves as non-religious, it is even more crucial for us to respond to the problems the younger generations are facing. We must share with them the words of the *nenbutsu* teaching that have the potential to resonate in their lives. It is also crucial for each of us sangha members to join together in creating “a future-oriented denomination.”

The basic idea for the Celebrations consists of the following three points:

- Reinforcing the foundation of our denomination—Establishing a new system of propagation
- Promoting the birth of persons who live according to the *nenbutsu* and ensuring a place where such persons can be born
- Sharing the teaching of Jōdo Shinshū with a wide range of people

With these points in mind, we will work to support the propagation activities of our local temples using all of the resources of our entire denomination. On this occasion, we wish to share the understanding of these points and ask for your continued support of the Celebration Projects in your districts.

Even though the propagation efforts at our local temples have been significantly impacted by the novel coronavirus pandemic, let us reconfirm our commitment to promoting our efforts to share the teaching, while seeking the wisdom to live in this modern age through the teaching of the *nenbutsu*.

These projects for the Celebrations are still in the planning stages, but we are committed to fulfill our goals. We humbly ask for your continued support.

## 4. Conclusion

After my presentation, Rev. Yūtai Ikeda will present to us the commemorative Dharma Talk. We express our heartfelt gratitude for his making the trip to Kyoto despite the difficulties of the current situation. I look forward to this opportunity to listen to his talk together with all of you.

Last but not least, I express my deepest appreciation for your attendance at the Preparatory Event for the 2023 Celebrations and the 750th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Honbyō today.

Thank you.

Bishop Hiroshi Tajima  
Chief Administrator, Shinshū Ōtani-ha