

## *Hyōbyaku (Pledge)*

This year, I have undertaken the responsibility to serve as the 26th Abbot of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha. On the occasion of the succession ceremony today, I humbly make this pledge before the image of Shinran Shōnin.

Based upon the Sutra on Immeasurable Life, the true teaching of the Buddha, Shinran Shōnin clarified that Jōdo Shinshū is a way of awakening through the practice of the recitation of the Buddha's Name and receiving the Original Vow embodied as the Name. He also showed us that Jōdo Shinshū is a true path leading to universal liberation for all humankind. Generations of our predecessors on this path have devoted themselves to maintaining our Honganji sangha in order to pass down the teaching of Shinran Shōnin faithfully to future generations.

In the Preamble of the Constitution of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha, it is stated,

Our *shūmon* has been supported and maintained by the deep sense of joy and gratitude held by generations of Dharma listeners who have revered the Honganji as the Shinshū Honbyō (Shinshū Memorial Hall), the “spiritual focus of Shinshū followers.” Furthermore, generations of leaders of the Honganji who are descendants of Shinran Shōnin have fulfilled the Shōnin's followers' trust by assuming the important role of *rusushiki* (caretaker) to take care of the memorial hall of the Shōnin. As one of the *rusushiki*, Rennyo Shōnin, who is revered as the restorer of the Honganji, revived Jōdo Shinshū by elucidating the significance of the teaching while deepening the relationships with our *on-dōbō on-dōgyō* (fellow seekers and travelers).

In November 2011, I received the appointment to serve as Associate Abbot and Overseas District Abbot. In April 2014, I was officially selected as Successor to the Abbot. The following year, I moved from Brazil to Japan where I have been living since then. Even though I grew up in Brazil, I have somehow managed to perform those important responsibilities. It is solely due to the tremendous support so many people have extended to me. In addition, I have learned a lot about the importance of cultivating the sense of gratitude in everyday life from the humble attitude of Former Abbot Chōken Ōtani, who has always shared his appreciation of life with our fellow seekers. I express my sincerest respect and most profound gratitude to the Former Abbot for faithfully observing the Constitution, serving as a wonderful example of how an Abbot should be in modern times, and fulfilling his duties with his singlehearted devotion to maintaining the Shinshū Honbyō and our sangha.

In 2023, our denomination will observe the 850th Celebration of Shinran Shōnin's Birth as well as the 800th Anniversary of the Establishment of Jōdo Shinshū. The previous celebration fifty years ago took place in the midst of the internal conflicts that were triggered by the *Kaishin* Incident in 1969. Even during such a critical time, our predecessors devoted themselves to reconfirm the original spirit of the *Dōbōkai* movement by elucidating the “spirituality of Shinran Shōnin” as well as defining the “distinctive characteristics of Shinshū” in doctrinal studies and propagation efforts. They showed us through their dedicated efforts that there are no hardships that could prevent us from committing ourselves to the path of Buddhadharma.

In today's society, there continue to be people who suffer from major problems such as poverty, discrimination, and disparities. But even more common are the countless numbers of people suffering from fear, anxieties, and isolation. On the other hand, there is also a growing trend for people, regardless of age group, to be disassociated with institutionalized religions including Buddhism. What do those harsh realities mean to us religious communities? The truth is that we are strongly urged to address those issues and deepen our understanding of the *nenbutsu* teaching as clarified by Shinran Shōnin. In fact, the teaching of Shinshū would

never have emerged in this world if Shinran Shōnin had not confronted major challenges in his life. He maintained his quest for enlightenment because of the hardships he experienced during his banishment in Echigo and on the frontier of Kantō.

Our denomination has selected the theme, “*Namu Amida Butsu*: To Discover the Meaning of Being Born as Human Beings,” for the celebration in 2023 in the hope that it would clarify the significance of those events in the world today while raising our awareness of current social issues. It is because it is even more important for us now to reflect upon ourselves from the standpoint of the Buddha’s Wisdom and Compassion, not from our own human intellect. Through such reflection, we can regain our appreciation of having been born as a human being. In other words, it is only through the lens of the *nenbutsu* that we can gain a true understanding of what we are. Especially in this modern age of advanced science and technology, we humans have the power to use science and technology to that end. Therefore, our decisions must be founded upon a truly religious mind which is the only source of our appreciation for life. To make clear what the religious mind means in modern society is the responsibility of religious leaders. The aspiration of Bodhisattva Dharmakara always gives us guidance on the religious mind, the mind of equality, which transcends differences of nationality, race, gender, and age.

From the moment our lives began, we have been embraced by the *nenbutsu*, and when our lives end, we will return to the world of the *nenbutsu*. This is what the teaching of Shinshū has told us. To share this teaching of *Namu Amida Butsu* with people around the world is an important mission for all us who are fortunate to have encountered the tradition of Shinshū. A sangha of *nenbutsu* followers has the power to give people courage to take on life’s challenges and to live their lives to the fullest. I sincerely wish that the spirit of the *nenbutsu* sangha will continue to inspire everyone and be passed down through the generations.

On this occasion, with deep appreciation for having been able to be part of this tradition, I pledge before the image of Shinran Shōnin that I will faithfully observe the provisions of the Constitution of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha which is the embodiment of the most cherished wishes of our fellow seekers, continue to listen to and to learn from the teaching of Shinshū. In addition, I will devote myself to the rituals that express reverence toward the Buddha and our spiritual forebears of our tradition, thereby working toward the realization of a *dōbō* society.

While bowing reverently toward the working of the Tathāgatha’s Wisdom and Compassion, to the virtues of the *nenbutsu* teaching that Shinran Shōnin clarified, I humbly wish for the continued support and guidance from our fellow seekers.

Shaku Shūmyō

November 20, 2020