

The Buddha's Wish for the World

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On the Occasion of

The 750th Memorial Service for

Shinran Shonin, 1173-1263

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The Buddha's Wish for the World: Essays of a Buddhist Abbot

On the occasion of the 750th memorial

For Shinran Shonin 1173-1263.

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We all like to put ourselves first

- 4) So, where are all the good guys?
- 5) When we delve into our own past we know
there is no one who is totally pure
- 6) It's only natural to have desires,
no need to suppress them
- 7) Trace anger and hatred back to their source
in our desires
- 8) Comfort, the seed of hardship;
hardship, the seed of comfort
- 9) Keep that mirror reflecting our frailty handy
- 10) Behind our words of sympathy and encouragement,
our true face peeks out, gloating—
how much better off am I!
- 11) Are we losing the art of living,
free of calculated effect and attachment to things?

Take off that suit of armor and relax!

The world would look a whole lot better if we did

- 12) Parents do not choose their kids
any more than kids choose their parents
- 13) There is no one alive who is completely useless
- 14) When we recall how it was thanks to that someone
we once knew
- 15) Are we starting each morning with an abundant
round of greetings?
- 16) A word of greeting will push open the wicker gate
to the hedge around the heart

Ever notice how the way we live ushers in

a sense of uneasiness and confusion

- 17) Life grows hollow not from the tedium of the day
but from the hardening of the heart
- 18) What is reflected in that mirror of ours?
- 19) Everyone grows old, that's just part
of our mission in life
- 20) Where do we suppose we came from?
- 21) Are we listening carefully to that important voice within?
- 22) Faith is not a matter of pleading to the gods and buddhas
to intervene on our behalf
- 23) Other power does not mean counting on others
- 24) There is more important living proof of the self
than fame, fortune, and family
- 25) What is the right way by which to think and do?

Come morning we greet the day with rosy faces,

Come evening we're nothing but a pile of white ashes:

Such is life!

- 26) We depart alone and we arrive alone
- 27) What is behind the precept against taking life?
- 28) The one great matter of our life hereafter
- 29) Knowing our loved ones who have passed
are always with us
- 30) We are never too young or too old to think about life
- 31) Going toward birth is a cause for happiness
- 32) When hate is not avenged by hate, peace prevails

Once our entrusting heart is set in place,

our passage to birth resolves itself

- 33) On saying *Namo-amida-butsu*—
without calculation,
say it with sincerity as an expression of gratitude
- 34) There is someone always calling to us—
knowing that is a great relief
- 35) An entrusting heart is what Amida Buddha bestows on us
- 36) All things are interconnected with one another—
this truth is called *Pratitya samutpada*

* Epilogue

Tell me, friend, why do you suppose we are alive?

1) To live is to search for an answer

Why do you suppose we are alive?

Once you start thinking about it, there is no end. The more we want our life to continue on, the more that desire itself becomes the seed of despair. In this sense, human beings are caught in a difficult situation. It would not be overstating the case to say that the whole of human suffering starts from this one question of why we are alive.

Is there, then, an answer to this question?

The short answer would be no, there is no easy answer we can find. It would seem that man was born into life to seek an answer to this question.

Although an answer may not appear during the course of a single day, as long as the strength to contemplate the matter remains within you, the beauty of the human enterprise is the very fact that we struggle with the question of how to live a meaningful life.

Those who are in the midst of a difficult period in their life may protest, saying, "Of what good is such advice?" I would offer that we not rush our answer and instead take the time to consider what living means.

Our life is a gift wished into existence

2) What is the meaning invested in our name?

When I was born, my parents gave me a name. My first name is Koshin. The first part, Ko, was added to my name when I was ordained as a priest at age fifteen. My name from childhood is Makoto, which is also pronounced Shin. My father chose the name Makoto, meaning "true," because he wanted me to be a person who would lead a life free of pretence and prevarication, one who aspires for the true. I came to call myself Makoto because from the very first moment of my life my parents had this wish for me.

And so I grew up with everyone around me calling me Makoto. It is the same for everyone. We grow up being called by a name that is invested with some kind of wish for our life.

In our temple, when a child is born, we have a ceremony for the baby's first visit to the temple, called *hatsumairi*. The first visit to the temple symbolizes the recognition on the part of the family that this new life has been born into the folds of the Buddha's wishes for the child, and also reaffirms the intent of those surrounding the newborn to raise the child as the child of the Buddha. The child who is brought to the temple on this first occasion is cradled in the arms of their parents and surrounded by the smiling faces of the family. The family, talking to the baby who does not understand what the words mean, puts their hands together. Seated before the Buddha, they make a wish that the baby grows up to be a good child and go through life full of happiness.

Another purpose of the baby's first visit is to remind us that throughout our lives we too have been the recipients of the many wishes of others. There is no one who has lived up to this point in their life by their own efforts alone. All of us embrace in our hearts the many wishes that people have made for us. In this way, we have received the wishes of our parents, our grandparents, our ancestors, and of those all around us.

3) Each of us has been granted the chance to live

In front of my house there is a sequoia tree that has grown so large it seems to pierce the sky. In 1951 a University of California professor named Dr. Ralph W. Chaney came to Japan to promote the metasequoia and planted one at our temple, the Nishi Hongwanji. I was six years old at the time. Ever since then, it has grown tall, dropping its leaves every autumn and sprouting buds come spring. Despite Kyoto's cold winter and hot, humid summer, it has somehow managed to thrive. Seeing this tree I often found myself lost in thought. Seeing it sporting fresh green leaves or its form flecked with snow, it would sometimes give me courage. On this great earth we live, surrounded by friends, I would find myself thinking, "I guess you and I are growing up together." As I looked at this tree that said not a word, I sensed the wish that this tree had for me.

During the Edo period there was a poet named Issa (1763-1828) who composed the following poem.

Even the lowly bamboo shoot	<i>takenoko mo</i>
Proclaims to all the world:	<i>nanoru ka</i>
"Truly I alone am the Honored One!"	<i>yui ga dokuson to</i>

When the bamboo shoot first pokes out its head, it is not so much its cuteness as the bearing with which it carries itself that wins us over. Issa must have noticed its commanding presence and overlaid it on the event of Sakyamuni Buddha's birth. He didn't just plop it down at the greengrocers for so many pennies a pound, but saw in that bamboo shoot another existence living the same life that we all live. He sensed that the same life force that resided in Sakyamuni Buddha was at work in the bamboo shoot and expressed this significance with the words, "Only I alone am the Honored One!"
