

# Whatever you do, pay attention.

*If one walks looking far ahead and pays no attention to the ground beneath his eyes, he will stumble. If one gazes critically upon others and forgets to look into himself he will bring tragedy upon himself*

Rennyō Shōnin

This observation by Rennyō Shōnin has practical applications as well as spiritual ones. We as Americans are always planning for the future; working hard; setting up trusts, buying insurance policies against any future contingency. Making sure that we leave an inheritance for future generations. It is an admirable quality. But it is not an attitude that is effective in all cases, especially when it comes to religion in general and Jōdōshinshū in particular.

Buddhism as the nembutsu is not for us; or for my family or for my children - it is for me alone. And it is for me alone now, not tomorrow or the day after. In this sense; we cannot plan for the future of the Nembutsu in America. To do so would be like spending all our time thinking about the packaging for a product we know nothing about or care nothing about. It's the packaging that's important, we can get to the value of the product later. This attitude is parallel to the attitude of being obsessed with how we are perceived by Others - What will people say about us ?

Religion is always taught and really understood by *ushiro sugata (the view from the back)*, that is to say, by living example rather than intellectual theories. Children do what we do rather than what we say, they watch us from the back and imitate our actions. Similarly, what takes place at a temple is observed from the back. What is being said or explained can only help clarify what is there in the members of the sangha. If there is nothing there, the clarifying words become irritating gibberish. If I am struggling honestly with my journey in the Nembutsu, packaging is secondary at best. The original name for a Buddhist temple was *dojo (Bodhimanda Bodi; place)* the place where Bodhi or Awakening was cultivated. If that Nembutsu awakening does not exist at a temple, even in a single member of the Sangha, no amount of funds, volunteer or salaried efforts, new horizons programs, increasing membership numbers, etc. entitle that organization to be called a temple.

The future of Jōdōshinshū in America depends upon me, now. I cannot help thinking that our concerns for the future are very often a way of avoiding the Nembutsu as an issue for me alone. Traditional Buddhist temples are profoundly communal institutions, emphasizing the group over the individual in its activities. At the same time the Nembutsu is a profoundly individual encounter. We do not find contentment, meaning, truth, and beauty. **I** find contentment, meaning, truth, and beauty - and **I** encounter it *alone*, even though **what** I encounter is connection with everything.

Senshin Temple is planning repairs and improvements on our physical structures, and reorganization and improvement of our activities. It is planning for the future generations as a by-product, but it is essentially providing for ourselves here and now. It is about making the physical temple more comfortable and beautiful, more conducive to present and planned gatherings. Religious buildings are beautiful for a reason, not just because they are rich. Planning for the future is a practical consideration.

Discovering meaning and beauty in your life is a spiritual consideration. Senshin members have always been generous when it comes to balancing efficiency and comfort with beauty - and it is an indicator of

its spiritual foundation. If Senshin was not now a place where the Nembutsu is encountered, beauty would not be a consideration in our temple life. We do this for ourselves, now - and if we do it seriously, honestly, and joyfully, the future will take care of itself. And if it doesn't, the Buddha was right after all - nothing, absolutely nothing lasts forever. In the meantime, we choose quality over quantity.

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