

## HOW TO APPLY NEMBUTSU TO YOUR DAILY LIFE.



We are very often asked how to apply the Nembutsu to our everyday lives.

It might be helpful to take a slightly different tack in approaching this question.

If the Nembutsu is about connecting with real and true life, the implication is that the life we are now living is not real and true. The world of Samsara, of delusion and suffering, is our life now. How to apply the Nembutsu to our everyday life is thus like asking: How do you apply real and true life to deluded life? The answer must then be: You cannot apply the Nembutsu to your everyday life – the Nembutsu is the awareness that your everyday life is not real and true.

To complicate matters even more, Shinran Shonin tells us that the awareness of real and true life comes concurrently with the awareness of our deluded, self-centered, samsaric life. In short, awakening comes with our awakening to our own self-centeredness; both arise simultaneously and paradoxically, and then just as quickly return to the dualistic state of Samsara – of right vs. wrong, good vs. bad, superior vs. inferior, etc., etc., ad nauseum. Our hondo can be seen to represent this paradox. The Hondo is made up of two parts; the Naijin or “inner altar”, and the Gejin or “outer altar. The Gejin consists of simple pews and is designed for comfort and efficiency, with almost no decorative elements. It is the world of Samsara, of self-centered delusion, it is the outer me. The Naijin is ablaze with gold leaf, lacquered tables, elaborate decorations, brocade altar cloths, flower arrangement, fragrant incense, etc., etc. It is not designed for comfort or



efficiency – it is designed to express sheer beauty, a beauty beyond the normal – a transcendent, natural beauty. It is the world of Nirvana, of the Pure Land called “ultimate relaxation”, the inner me.

The Naijin and Gejin at Senshin are separated by a Makishoji, or sliding doors with rice paper panels which are opened for services and closed again – but with the two center panels left open to show only a glimpse of the inner altar. It is a kind of reminder of our duplicity about the inner world, shutting it off most of the time and only occasionally noticing it, or coming to it in time of need. The Nembutsu path is not a journey from the outer self to the inner self. It is the sometimes conscious, most of the time unconscious awareness of the two diametrically opposed worlds as being at the same time, one. They are one, yet separate; not two, yet not one. This is Namuamidabutsu: Namu is me, the Gejin, the left hand, Samsara, the world of suffering created and centered around the ego-self. Amidabutsu is Amida Buddha, the ultimate reality expressed in human form, Nirvana, the world of ultimate truth, reality, and beauty, the right hand. On the altar, the flowers on the left represent the ever-changing Namu world, the candlelight on the right represents the unchanging light of the Amidabutsu world.

When you place your hands together in gassho you are expressing the unity of Namu and Amidabutsu, the religious paradox of “not one, yet not two”. You do this after burning incense “oshoko with its symbolism of simultaneous life and death, the understanding of which brings you to the door of the Naijin.

The Mahayana expression of “not one, yet not two” or “neither the same nor different” is not a matter of intellectual understanding but of religious awakening or connection. How then can you apply the world of the Naijin to the world of the Gejin? By seeing that they are not one, yet not two; not the same, yet not different. The Gejin is our normal world seen from the standpoint of the self, and the Naijin is the same world seen from the natural standpoint of non-self. Our outer self is filled with false discriminations in which we must be positive, be proud, confront, be adversarial, be engaged, be relevant, be concerned, be compassionate, learn to love, think, study, analyze, stand up, be active, et., etc. Our inner self is only for understanding our connection to all things and enjoying the beauty of that connection.

Namuamidabutsu, Namuamidabutsu, Namandabu, Namanda.

*Rev. Mas*