



Hōnen

A Collection of Buddhist Sermons by Jodo Shu Priests from around the World

Achieving Happiness Through The Words of Hōnen

By Rev. Tetsuyu Wilson

Jodo Shu Buddhism Community of Australia

Amidaji was established in Brisbane, Australia in 2004. Its aim was to propagate the teachings of Hōnen. Furthermore, this aim was to be achieved by undertaking various activities. The missionary who undertook this task was Reverend Tetsuyu Wilson. That's me.

Since 2004, I have sometimes been called upon to help lessen the burden of suffering of families and individuals. The causes of their suffering are varied but by turning to the teachings of Hōnen, I can always find a way to assist them. For instance, there was a young woman whose husband was gravely ill in hospital. He had entered palliative care and the doctors told her that he would pass away within a few months. Life as she had known it with her husband would soon come to an end and she naturally felt lost and anxious for the future. Seeking advice and reassurance, she visited Amidaji and asked me, "What will I do after my husband passes away?"

Having lost my younger brother last year in



Amidaji



Expounding on the words of Honen

similar circumstances, I know all too well that life is fleeting. Hōnen describes it thus, "The petals of the beautiful flower that blooms in the morning are lightly

scattered by the breeze of nightfall. Dew drops of the evening disappear in the light of the morning sun" (Y. Hayashi and J. Atone, Trans. 2007). This is the natural state of this world and we are powerless to resist it. Moreover, resistance creates more suffering. "Those who meet must part," said Hōnen. For the young woman, understanding the reality of impermanence helped her accept her situation and she was ready to move on with her life.

Furthermore, her anxiety concerning her future faded when she heard these words of Hōnen. "Parting today is only a fleeting sorrow, as transient as a dream on a Spring evening. Whether we trust or revile each other, let one who precedes lead the one who follows into the Pure Land" (Y. Hayashi and J. Atone, Trans.

2007). A great burden seemed to have been lifted from her as she listened to these words. She was no longer bent over in sorrow. Her furrowed



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brow relaxed and her lips curved upwards in a serene smile. She was thinking of the time when she



Words of Honen

would eventually reunite with her husband in the Pure Land. Hope had replaced despair and she decided to live a full and happy life so that when she did meet her hus-

band again in the Pure Land she would have so many things to share with him.

For centuries, the teachings of Hōnen have been able to relieve the suffering of ordinary people like you and I. And, we are very fortunate in the West because the words of Hōnen contained within the *Ganso-daishi Gohougo* have been translated into English by Yoko Hayashi and Joji Atone.

Namu Amida Butsu.

A Buddhist's Thought on Romance

Rev. Kodo Tanaka
Jodoshu North America Buddhist Missions

How does “love” look like from the Buddhist point of view? Of course, there are many acts out of “love” that are selfless and unconditional. But in Buddhism, the selfish aspect of “love” is often referred to as “thirst” that initiates one’s quest for something that would satisfy his desire physically or mentally, such as food, sex, fame, and fortune. Physical thirst such as hunger, sleeplessness, and sexual desire, can be relieved temporarily once appeased. For instance, no matter how hungry we become, we cannot continue eating once an appetite is satisfied.

But when it comes to thirst that is related to our social relationships, such as wealth and fame, it seems there is no end for these desires to be fulfilled. While knowing that we cannot stay younger than yesterday, our quest for youth does not leave us. It disappoints me when I see faces of my favorite Hollywood stars changing with unnatural firm skin for their ages. They seem to be revealing their insatiable desire behind the scene to be younger than what they are. Although disappointed, it reminds me that I am no different. I do not stop my effort to look younger and believe that I am not the only one who does so.

As shown by the phrase “love at the first sight”, visual information appeals greatly when we fall in love with someone. This is why we work hard to impress others with our appearance. However, when meeting people, we are somehow able to catch signs beneath the appearances to create our impressions on him/her, aren’t we? Just like the health of our internal organs appears on our skin, it is also true

that our minds and personality are revealed in our appearances.

We all love flowers and praise their beauty. Why do flowers look so beautiful? Is that about the color or shape? How about putting it this way, it is because they do not have an ulterior motive to look beautiful? There is an old Japanese saying that goes, “If you are delighted to see the flower blossoms, think on the root in the ground that made it happen.” Beneath the ground, where we cannot see, the root of all flowers is striving fully to “live” each moment. They do not have time to entertain a motive to impress their spectators.

If this applies to us, what we should pay attention to most is to cultivate our inner-self. To do so, Buddhism teaches us to be careful in making our conduct, speech, and thought, the Three-fold karmas that would form the personality of our own. All karmas, that is any action, word, or idea, are supposed to have a force to repeat it. For instance, if we lie for the first time, we regret having done it. But because we have to tell another lie to make the first one to be true, we continue to lie. While repeating lies, we gradually get used to ourselves lying with no regret. This is how we accumulate this unwholesome karma and unknowingly create the personality as a “liar”.

Accordingly, to cultivate our inner-self that initiates all our karmas to arise, either good or bad, Buddhism encourages us to put a religious act into prac-



tice daily that would help us not to entertain ourselves with wrong actions, bad speeches, and unhealthy thought. Nenbutsu, the daily recitations of “Namu Amida Butsu” that accompanies our physical and mental commitment, is the very religious act for all Pure Land Buddhists to put into practice.



However, Nenbutsu does not guarantee beauty on our appearances filled with healthy radiance overflowing from inside. Because it is people you face that evaluate what kind of personality you have. If so, an impression of ourselves is something we cannot control as we want to.

Then, let us look at a romantic relationship. Since this relationship requires another person to be a part of it, it is a matter that does not depend only on our side of the story. Accordingly, the relationship would not work if “love” involved there is like a quest for water only to ease one’s thirst. The “love” from both sides needs to be reciprocal for this relationship to work. Because it must take two to make it work and it is unknown if the two may be reciprocal, either of the two is unable to control it. The only area you can control is to live fully like flowers and present yourself before the one you love just as you are.

However, it is not easy. What if your “love” is rejected, or if you lose him/her? Because you care so much if he/she accepts you or not, it would take

all your determination and energy to do so. Thinking back, I was always afraid to present what I am to girls I loved and became protective trying not to be hurt too much to get over in case things went wrong. Was that because I cared very much about the girls? No, it was not. Now I know that I cared very much not about the girls but my pride, trying to protect it from the damage from the possible heartbreak or broke-up would bring. It was not the relationships but my pride that I cared much, which had a thirst for protection.

It is ridiculous to prioritize the protection of my pride over a possibly great relationship that may bring happiness. For people like me, I wish to introduce guidance I received from my mentor during my wedding ceremony a long ago. In his speech representing both families of our couple, he said, “Now you got married and you both are happy like never before. But do not look at each other with love in your eyes. It will last only for 3 days or so. Born in different places, raised by different parents, and grew up under different circumstances. The difference is the only thing you will find from each other, and it is a matter of course. You will become unable to stand differences if you keep looking at each other.” He concluded his speech with a quote from “The Little Prince” by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, “Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward in the same direction.”

I hope that there will be many more who embrace Nenbutsu as the means to look outward in the same direction with a partner.

Namu Amida Butsu.



Profile



Tetsuyu Wilson

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It’s not what you do in life that matters, it’s how you do it.



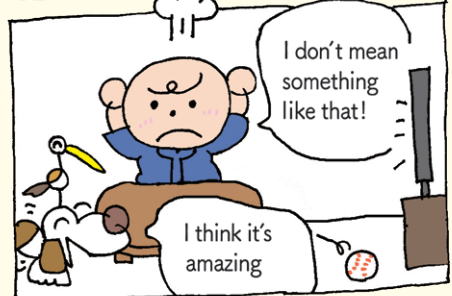
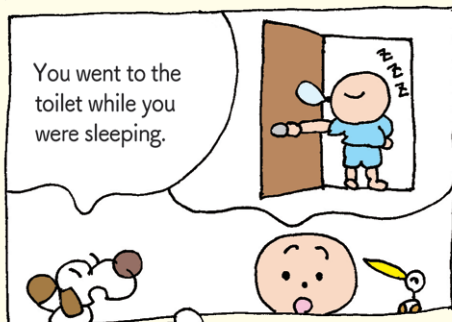
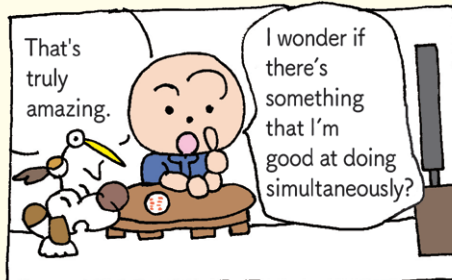
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Hello! NamuChan ②

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Hōnen Shonin (1133-1212)



Credit for the cover portrait of Hōnen Shonin: Saishoin Temple, Tokyo

The founder of Jodo Shu

Hōnen studied and practiced Buddhism at Mt. Hiei, the center of Buddhist study at the time.

He read through all of the Buddhist scriptures available and it was Master Shantao's commentary on the Meditation Sutra which inspired him to put aside all practices other than nenbutsu. He had conviction only nenbutsu was rightly activity that would lead to salvation without fail, for it accorded with the essential vow of Amida Buddha.

This religious conviction occurred when he was 43 years old. After realizing the truth of nenbutsu, Hone left Mt. Hiei for Kyoto and began to spread the teaching of nenbutsu. In the spring of 1175, he founded Jodo Shu.