

Nenbutsu and Meditation: Problems with the Categories of Contemplation, Devotion, Meditation, and Faith

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A DISCUSSION OF NENBUTSU and meditation serves to remind us of something that is very strange: that nenbutsu and meditation, or devotion and contemplation, are usually thought of as exclusionary activities by Jōdo Shinshū Buddhists on the one hand, as well as by Western followers of “meditative” forms of Buddhism such as Zen, Tibetan sects, and *vipassanā* traditions on the other hand. While this state of affairs may seem quite normal in the modern-day versions of these traditions, in fact it is quite a peculiar way of thinking about Buddhist practice. For most of the history of Buddhism, “devotional” practices like prayer, invocation, and offerings have not been at odds or even very distinctly separated from “contemplative” practices such as meditation, sutra copying, and sutra recitation. Often it is even difficult to determine whether a practice is devotional or contemplative.¹

The standard view that such practices are exclusionary is in part related to the history of Buddhism in Japan, especially sectarian formation that occurred in the Edo period, forcing Pure Land and Zen sects in particular to define their practices by excluding what seemed to belong to the other.² The idea that Buddhism “naturally” has sects with distinct doctrines, practices, and congregations also fits neatly with Western Christian views of religious formation (based on schisms and sectarian formations) that dominates the general view of “what religion is” among the general populace as well as in the academic study of religion. In this respect, Japanese Buddhism is “easy to understand” in contrast to Chinese, Korean, and other continental forms of Buddhism in which a variety of practices are performed regardless of sectarian monikers.

In the Japanese sects, any attempt to bridge the sectarian divide is viewed with extreme suspicion. This attitude seems to have translated into American forms of these sects as well. Many temple members do not seem inclined to consider meditation and have expressed a number of valid concerns: Why should Jōdo Shinshū temples now offer meditation sessions

when they have never done so before? Does seeking to perform meditation run counter to Shinran's teaching, which stresses the inadequacy of self-power (*jiriki*) and therefore seems to reject meditation and other ritual practices? These questions deserve serious consideration.

A discussion of the possible role of meditation in Shin Buddhism provides us with an opportunity to address these questions and to rethink many long-held ideas and assumptions about what Shin Buddhism is. This paper seeks to open discussion on the above questions while also considering whether *shinjin* has any correspondence with *zazen*. Bringing Shinran's teaching of *nenbutsu* and *shinjin* together with Dōgen's teaching of *zazen* (or *shikan taza*, "just sitting") will in fact force us into a larger consideration of what Buddhism is, both for these Kamakura-period thinkers and for people today. Is Buddhism about meditation and enlightenment, or is it about something else? Must the individual actively seek the goal, or is it already attained?

Below the paper first addresses the issue of *nenbutsu* in the context of early medieval Japan, looking at the roots of *nenbutsu* as a meditative practice and questioning whether the categories of "contemplation" and "devotion" are necessarily exclusive. Next, I will use this questioning of dichotomies as a basis for reexamining Shinran's ideas about *nenbutsu* and *shinjin* to argue that Shinran not only rejected the meditation practices of his day but also rejected *nenbutsu*. To understand how this is so, I examine the idea of *shinjin*, often translated as "faith" but more literally "entrusting-mind," in terms of how Shinran understood this term in connection with then current ideas about enlightenment, buddha-nature, and practice, briefly discussing how Shinran's teachings about *nenbutsu* and *shinjin* might be compatible with Dōgen's *zazen*. Finally, I would like to bring all of this history into the present, to consider what might be the benefits to Jōdo Shinshū temples and members of doing meditation, what might be some problems, and what might be the benefits of *not* doing meditation.

I. THE NENBUTSU'S ROOTS IN MEDITATIVE PRACTICES: MEDITATION OR DEVOTION?

Because of the sectarian nature of Buddhism in modern Japan, people who focus on Japanese Buddhism sometimes forget that the *nenbutsu* is not the sole province of the Japanese Pure Land schools. Reciting the *nenbutsu* is a practice commonly performed even today by all Buddhists, both lay and monastic, in other East Asian (Mahayana) nations such as China, Korea, and Vietnam. In medieval Japan, these practices had been brought from China and were popular at all levels of society. Although these practices are typically called meditative or "contemplative *nenbutsu*" (*kan nenbutsu*,

観念仏; *ukan nenbutsu*, 有観念仏), here I would like to overview the range of meditative nenbutsu practices found in medieval Japan and consider whether discreet categories such as contemplation and devotion accurately characterize them.

The practice of nenbutsu has since its beginnings been a meditative practice. In ancient and medieval India, the practice of *buddhānusmṛti*, “recollecting the buddha,” involved a range of activities, mostly centered on meditative techniques for visualizing a buddha.³ These techniques could be used to visualize any buddha, but even in India Amitābha (Amitāyus) already seems to have been an important focus. In medieval China, with the popularity of the *Contemplation Sutra* (*Guan wuliangshou jing*, 觀無量壽經; Jpn. *Kanmuryōjūkyō*) and the teaching that Amitou was the most compassionate of buddhas and most receptive of people’s supplications, this buddha became the main figure associated with “recollecting the buddha,” to the point that the term *nianfo* came almost exclusively to mean recollecting the Buddha Amitou.

Scholarship on the practices of nianfo as developed in China has tended to investigate nianfo as a meditative endeavor performed by monastics and recorded in monastic texts, like sutras, commentaries, and the biographies of monks. However, we should also remember that nianfo was advocated as a practice for laypeople and had a devotional aspect. But nor should we too quickly make a hard distinction, that meditative practice is for monks and devotional practice for laypeople. As Daniel Stevenson has shown in his work on Chinese Pure Land practices and ritual manuals, laypeople too performed meditative nianfo practices, such as seven-day mindfulness retreats, typically held at monasteries, involving rigorous schedules of practice and strict observance of precepts and monastic norms while in the monastery.⁴ Nor should we assume that monastic practice and lay practice were necessarily distinct: monks and nuns might call on the buddha as an act of faith in the same way that laypeople might. Indeed, even distinguishing between meditative practice and devotional practice may be a mistake. As Stevenson notes, “In nearly every case, recollection of the Buddha is integrated seamlessly within an extended framework of ritual worship and purificatory restraint, rendering it difficult to make any absolute distinction between meditative, devotional, or ritualistic aspects.”⁵

During the first few centuries of Buddhist history in Japan, meditative, devotional, and ritualistic practices focusing on Amida were popularized by monks (from the continent and native Japanese) and by lay immigrants from the continent (although we know little about this latter group). By the mid-Heian period, Japanese monks were beginning to create their own forms of practice. The following offers a brief overview of the different kinds of nenbutsu practice known in Japan in the early medieval period when figures such as Hōnen, Shinran, and Dōgen were at Mt. Hiei. In looking at these

practices, I would like to consider the question of whether they should be categorized as monastic or lay, devotional or contemplative.

1. *Jōgyō zanmai* and Other Visualization Practices

The *jōgyō zanmai*, or “constantly walking *samādhi*,” was a form of meditative nenbutsu that was created in Japan within the Tendai school. The monk Ennin (794–864) had brought back from China the popular practice of reciting the Name of Amida Buddha, and at Mt. Hiei this became combined with a walking meditation practice to create this new nenbutsu form. In this practice, the monk recites the Name of Amida Buddha while circumambulating an Amida statue with the intent of achieving a visualization of the buddha and therein realizing the nonduality of buddha and the practitioner.⁶ This practice is a monastic one and is typically considered to be contemplative.

Another popular monastic nenbutsu practice was the “contemplative nenbutsu” (*kan nenbutsu*) popularized by Genshin (942–1017). Genshin taught the contemplation of Amida Buddha through the visualization of the Buddha and his Pure Land. This method, like the above, was a type of meditative or *samādhi* practice, the goal being to achieve a vision of Amida rather than emphasis on the nenbutsu as chanting or oral practice.⁷ As the name “contemplative nenbutsu” implies, this practice is considered to be contemplative and monastic. However, both of these practices entail a large devotional component as the practitioner recites the Name and ardently focuses on the image of Amida. The devotional or emotive aspects of *samādhi* practice cannot be separated out from the contemplative.

2. Death-Bed Practices

Death-bed practices focusing on Amida Buddha and birth in the Pure Land were first introduced to Japan by Genshin for use by monks. However, these practices quickly gained popularity among laypeople as well, including aristocrats, warriors of all ranks, provincial officials, and commoners. Here it is not easy—or even necessary—to distinguish whether this was a lay or monastic practice: it was simply “Buddhist practice.”

Death-bed practices are generally described as visualization practice. The dying person recites the nenbutsu while visualizing Amida’s physical marks, his radiant light, and his descent to welcome the dying person to the Pure Land. The person might also look upon a statue of Amida and hold on to five-colored cords tied to that statue, to help the person visualize following Amida.⁸ Later in the medieval period, other physical practices were also encouraged, such as forming *mudrās*, holding ritual implements (*vajras* or incense burners), or holding a written statement of the person’s

vow to be born in the Pure Land.⁹ Death-bed practices involving visualization are often considered contemplative practices. However, just as these practices cannot be categorized as either simply monastic or lay, they should also not be forced into a description that emphasizes contemplation and ignores devotion—or vice versa. Death-bed practices might be considered both entirely contemplative and entirely devotional.

It should also be noted that the above practices influenced the creation of some of the most famous artistic and architectural treasures of Japan, such as paintings of Amida's descent (*raigōzu*), depictions of the Pure Land like the Taima Mandara, and the creation of temples such as the Byōdoin at Uji.

3. Dancing Nenbutsu

Although the dancing nenbutsu (*odori nenbutsu*) is most associated with the medieval figure Ippen (1239–1289), the practice originates with the Heian-period Tendai monk Kūya (903–972). Kūya is credited with moving the nenbutsu from the confines of the monastery out to the people. He became a wandering monk (*hijiri*), teaching the recitation of the nenbutsu that became combined with spontaneous ecstatic dancing.¹⁰

The dancing nenbutsu gained its greatest popularity in the medieval period with the teachings of Ippen and the Ji sect of Buddhism. The illustrated biography of Ippen's life, the *Ippen hijiri-e*, depicts scenes of monks in marketplaces erupting into spontaneous dance and recitation of the nenbutsu. The dancing nenbutsu is typically thought of as a non-contemplative, devotional practice, and it is often assumed to be a practice for laypeople. However, both the text and the images of the *Ippen hijiri-e* indicate that monks were the central participants and practitioners.¹¹ The practice became "popular" because of the strong monastic interest and the work of monks in spreading the Jishū teachings. Thus, here we have an example of a practice that is usually thought of as lay and devotional but in fact has a strong monastic base and is related to monastic practice.

4. Esoteric Nenbutsu Practices

The Shingon school also had its distinctive uses and interpretations of the nenbutsu and Amida. Shingon doctrines are based in the esoteric teaching of the "nondual" (*funi*), that everything in the world is in no way distinct from Dainichi, the primary buddha of the Shingon system. Thus any sound is the voice of Dainichi, and any location or any physical thing is co-existent with the buddha's body, the *dharmakāya* or *dharmadhātu*. Realization of this teaching results in the Shingon goal of *sokushin jōbutsu*, "buddhahood in this very body."

Based on these doctrines, we see examples like the monk Kakukai (1142–1223) who taught that the Pure Land is not different from this very

world we live in.¹² Kakuban (1095–1143) also saw in the chanting of the Name Amida a gateway into limitless wisdom and virtue, explaining in his *Amida hishaku* (Esoteric Explication of Amida) that “‘A’ stands for the One Mind’s equanimity in primordial non-arising; ‘mi’ stands for the One Mind’s equanimity as the selfless Great Self; ‘da’ stands for the multitudinous dharmas of the One Mind, which are both absolute and tranquil.”¹³

More generally, in the “secret nenbutsu” (*himitsu nenbutsu*) practices of the Shingon school, the recitation of the nenbutsu is not considered an invocation but is thought of as a “constituent element of the human body, innate, perfect, inherently pure.”¹⁴ The nenbutsu was identified with the breath, or life force, so that the simple act of breathing itself becomes a never-ending inhalation and exhalation of nenbutsu.

Esoteric Shingon practices such as these are often thought of as meditative and ritual practices devoid of aspects of faith and devotion. However, as Mark Unno has shown in his study of the Shingon-Kegon monk Myōe (1173–1232), contemplation and devotion, ritual practice and faith are intimately connected in these practices. Myōe was a famed meditator, but his major teaching was faith in the Mantra of Light. Although such things as mantra and mudrā are certainly part of practices the esoteric practitioner uses to understand identity with the buddhas, this understanding is not separate from faith. For Myōe in particular, salvation in this *mappō* age could only come through “[f]aith in the cosmic buddhas, and the embodiment of this faith through the mantra.”¹⁵ Myōe understood faith and enlightenment as interrelated, that “faith and enlightenment were always one, mutually sustaining.”¹⁶ Esoteric meditative practice was simultaneously the equivalent of faith and enlightenment.

In sum, the demarcation between contemplative practice (meditation) and devotion (faith) is not clear in these many examples of Buddhist practice from the Heian and Kamakura periods Japan. It is beyond the scope of this paper to demonstrate it, but practice, devotion, and even doctrinal study have never been distinct in the history of Buddhism throughout Asia. It is rather our modern affliction to make categories and posit them as exclusive that has skewed our perceptions of meditation and devotion. Equating practice, faith, and enlightenment was the general standard in Buddhist doctrine. And it is in this context that Shinran too creates his doctrine of faith and practice.

It is often simply stated that Shinran rejected the meditative practices. However, given the interrelation between contemplation and devotion, meditation and faith, if Shinran rejected one then we must also infer that he rejected the other. That is, Shinran rejected the entire Buddhist system of the day. Others—notably Dōgen—were involved in similar projects of rejecting past practices in order to formulate something new. Because these reformulations were so radical, I think it is helpful to think of Shinran as

rejecting nenbutsu, and Dōgen as rejecting meditation, in order to understand how they then reconstructed these categories.

II. SHINRAN'S REJECTION OF NENBUTSU PRACTICE

Shinran's teaching is not usually referred to as the rejection of nenbutsu. Nor is Dōgen's teaching usually referred to as the rejection of meditation. Rather, typically Shinran is said to have taught faith and nenbutsu practice, and Dōgen is said to have taught meditation. Although Shinran and Dōgen used the terms "faith" and "meditation," both were involved in an enterprise that completely rewrote the meanings of these terms so that their usage of these words must be understood rather as a code for something entirely new at this time when faith, practice, and enlightenment had become radically equated.

Dōgen's new "meditation" and Shinran's new "nenbutsu" were formulated in thirteenth-century Japan as part of what we might call the final resolution of the issues of buddha-nature and mappō that had plagued East Asian Buddhism since at least the seventh century. In short, the teachings of buddha-nature and mappō had resulted in a crisis of practice: given the "fact" of buddha-nature (that every being has the potential for buddhahood—often combined or elided with the idea of original enlightenment [*hongaku*], that every being is actually already enlightened), as well as the issue of mappō (that in the age of the decline of the Dharma no being can attain buddhahood because there is no access to a buddha or the true teaching), then what is the meaning of practice? If all beings are already bound for buddhahood (or are already enlightened), why practice? Or, from the contradictory viewpoint of mappō, if there is no hope for enlightenment, why practice?

This crisis of practice had already begun to be addressed in China with the development of the Chan school. Although Chan is called the "meditation" school, the Chan traditions have systematically rejected all traditional practices of meditation and created an entirely new doctrine, vocabulary, and ritual of practice, such as the use of *kung-an* (Jpn. *kōan*) to induce an "initial enlightenment" experience. Such "meditative practices" would hardly have been recognized as meditation at all by those who practiced *dhyāna* and *samādhi* in India. For the Chan schools, practice was not about progressing in increasingly difficult levels of meditation to attain a goal (enlightenment). It was instead a sudden moment of insight into one's true nature as already a buddha.

In medieval Japan, the redefinition of practice was elaborated further. Hōnen was the first to intimate the radical nature of what a new practice should be with his complete rejection of the necessity of the monastic life-

style. Perhaps inspired by Hōnen's example, others took up the challenge to reformulate Buddhist doctrine and practice. The most extreme of these reformulations were those created by Dōgen and Shinran. Each of these thinkers rejected prior Buddhist practices to create practices that were "no practice"—that is, practices that did not require the traditional Buddhist practices of the monk's life and meditation—and that answered the challenges of both doctrines of buddha-nature and mappō.¹⁷

Shinran's ideas are perhaps today not often discussed in terms of buddha-nature. The issue of mappō seems to dominate modern discourse on Shin Buddhism: that we are evil persons unfortunate to have been born in the age of the decline of the Dharma, without the possibility to escape samsara and attain enlightenment. However, Shinran's teaching of the nenbutsu and shinjin—which I will translate as "entrusting-mind"—was an approach based in understanding of both mappō and buddha-nature, as I shall attempt to show briefly.

Shinran's teaching is often characterized as a rejection of the monastic practices of the Tendai institution, particularly meditative practices. This is certainly true. But we should also remember that he rejected the practice of nenbutsu as well. That is to say, every one of the nenbutsu-related practices described in the preceding section of this paper Shinran rejected. He rejected the old nenbutsu practices in order to create a new "nenbutsu," a new definition of what practice means that in its details is hardly recognizable as practice at all.

Shinran's nenbutsu removes the nenbutsu from the realm of human practice and reformulates it as the expression of *tathatā*, suchness itself. One does not say the nenbutsu as a practice for achieving a vision of Amida. One does not say it to achieve a boon in this life, nor even to achieve salvation. One says it because one has already attained liberation, in other words, birth in the Pure Land and enlightenment. The nenbutsu is an expression of the One Mind or Suchness (*shinnyo*) that is Amida Tathāgata. The nenbutsu is the mental, verbal, and even physical expression through the person of Amida's working. Thus saying the nenbutsu is not a practice but simply how Amida is expressed through the person. It is also the rejoicing of shinjin, which Shinran describes in this way:

Shinjin is the aspiration to bring all beings to the attainment of supreme nirvana; it is the heart of great love and great compassion. This shinjin is Buddha-nature and Buddha-nature is Tathagata. To realize this shinjin is to rejoice and be glad. People who rejoice and are glad are called "people equal to the Buddhas."

*Notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone" (Yuishinshō mon'i)*¹⁸

In this statement, Shinran's definition of shinjin collapses the categories of faith, mind, practice, and enlightenment, thus completely changing the

discussion about practice. Following the general Mahayana teachings of his time, Shinran's discussion is based on the assumption that the mind of the sentient being is already the mind of the Buddha or Tathāgata.¹⁹ One's own mind is the mind of Amida; there is an inherent identity of the person and the Buddha. Thus, Shinran says, without controversy, that *shinjin*, the entrusting-mind of the individual, is equivalent to buddha-nature, which is to say that it is equivalent to the Tathāgata itself, and thus such people are already "equal to the Buddhas."

The question for Shinran, and other thinkers of the day, was not how to attain enlightenment. Enlightenment was already a given. The problem was how to recognize one's enlightenment, and how to practice it. Thus the issue of practice comes to constitute two aspects: (1) a recognition of one's enlightenment, and (2) the functioning of that enlightenment in the person's everyday life. Strictly speaking, these two are not Buddhist "practices" at all. One is oneself not doing anything to achieve enlightenment. For Shinran, the moment of recognition is called *shinjin*, when one realizes that "shinjin is Buddha-nature and Buddha-nature is Tathagata." Again, the person does not perform any traditional Buddhist practice to achieve this recognition. For Shinran, the functioning of enlightenment in the person's life is the *nenbutsu*. The person does not say the *nenbutsu* to achieve any goal but simply because this is how a person expresses and lives in joy and gladness and being "equal to the Buddhas." Shinran has taken what was once a Buddhist practice—the recitation of the *nenbutsu*—and turned it into something that is no longer a practice but a recognition and then state of being.

Although there is not space here to explore Dōgen's *zazen* in depth, it develops out of the same ideas of buddha-nature and original enlightenment.²⁰ Just as Shinran rejected the *nenbutsu* as a practice for getting something, Dōgen too stripped any implications of traditional Buddhist practice out of his conception of "just sitting." Compare, for example, Dōgen's statement in his *Fukan zazen gi* that "Fundamentally speaking, the basis of the way is perfectly pervasive; how could it be contingent on practice and verification? The vehicle of the ancestors is naturally unrestricted; why should we expend sustained effort?"²¹ One does not use meditation as a practice or means to achieve enlightenment. One sits in order to express—or acknowledge or fulfill—the fact that one is already identical to the buddhas, just as for Shinran the *nenbutsu* is an expression of the fact that one is "equal to the Buddhas."

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR JŌDO SHINSHŪ TODAY

In terms of basic doctrines and premises, Shinran's teaching of the *nenbutsu* shares much in common with Dōgen's teaching of "just sitting."

Indeed, at this foundational level, their ideas are very much the same. The issue was not the theory of enlightenment but the nature of practice. Shinran and Dōgen took the premises of the Mahayana teachings of buddha-nature and the mind of Tathāgata to their logical extremes: new formulations of practice as “no practice.” The difference between these two thinkers lies then only in their choice of a method for expressing or fulfilling what is already there.

The extreme closeness of the ideas of Shinran and Dōgen leads one to conclude that a nenbutsu practitioner and a zazen practitioner should feel free to use both methods. However, a doctrinal basis is not necessarily the main concern of an individual who seeks to practice both nenbutsu and meditation, nor is doctrinal agreement sufficient to form the basis for a movement that might seek to put these two together. The real issue for Jōdo Shinshū is not the doctrinal compatibility of the nenbutsu and Sōtō-style meditation but rather sociological issues regarding the identity of the sangha and general perceptions of Buddhism in American culture. People from outside of the Jōdo Shinshū tradition often come to a temple looking for meditative practice. People who are long-time members of BCA temples, on the other hand, have been reluctant to incorporate meditative practice into Jōdo Shinshū services.

The issue is in large part one of the perception in modern America of the role of meditation in Buddhism. There is a tendency to assume that the central Buddhist practice is meditation, despite the fact that most Buddhists do not meditate. A noted scholar of Zen has remarked on this misapprehension of the nature of Buddhist practice:

Such a view of Buddhist practice has been widespread not only in our academic literature but in the contemporary popular understanding of the religion, where the question, do you practice? is very often almost synonymous with do you meditate? Put this way, needless to say, the question is an awkward one not only for most Buddhist scholars but for most Buddhists. Put this way, the great majority of Buddhists throughout history have never practiced their religion.²²

Jōdo Shinshū, as a form of Buddhism that has historically minimized the importance of meditation, has sometimes been viewed by those outside of the tradition as not “real” Buddhism. However, in the greater context of the history of Buddhism as indicated in the preceding quotation, Jōdo Shinshū is clearly a normative form of Buddhism, and in fact has a great deal to offer toward the popular understanding of Buddhism. Practice in Jōdo Shinshū as in most (if not all) of the forms of Buddhism brought by Asian immigrants is based in community and family as opposed to the

“heroic quest” model of the individual searching for a profound experience of enlightenment.

Although the aim of this paper has been to show the compatibility—even identity—of practices labeled meditative versus devotional, or contemplative versus faith, and that Shinran’s ideas of nenbutsu actually line up quite well with Dōgen’s ideas of meditation, it is not my intention to conclude that Shin temples in America should therefore freely adopt the practice of meditation. There may be benefits to incorporating a “no practice” form of meditation into Jōdo Shinshū, especially if it were combined with nenbutsu. This might provide insight into the meditative or contemplative aspects of entrusting-mind in Shinran’s “no practice” nenbutsu, which is otherwise perceived to be “only” devotional, even by many Jōdo Shinshū members. But Shinran’s idea of entrusting-mind (*shinjin*) is after all not simply a devotional faith in Amida but a recognition of Amida as suchness (*tathatā*) working in the world and the individual. In this respect, *shinjin* is not devoid of the contemplative and wisdom aspects of Buddhism. While I certainly agree that Sōtō-style meditation is not incompatible with Jōdo Shinshū at a doctrinal level, simply putting Sōtō meditation into a Jōdo Shinshū service may be problematic, or even counterproductive, to both Jōdo Shinshū specifically and to the maturation of Buddhism in America generally. The problem is not whether meditation and nenbutsu can be practiced together, but why we should buy into the idea that meditation is the quintessential Buddhist practice, when, as the scholar of Zen noted above, the “great majority of Buddhists throughout history” have never practiced meditation.

The juncture that presents itself to American Shin Buddhism is, I think, an opportunity to provide a correction to the general assumption that Buddhism is primarily about meditation. As forms of Buddhism from other Asian nations—Vietnam, Thailand, Taiwan—gain in numbers and visibility in America, the fact that most Buddhists do not take meditation as their primary practice becomes more apparent. As these new immigrant communities become “Americanized,” the general American populace will also become more aware of the family and community aspects of Buddhism. We are perhaps on the brink of a new period of Buddhism in America in which a greater understanding or maturity is occurring. There is also the literal maturing of the people who have until now been interested in Buddhism as meditation. As they “grow up,” marry, and have children, they seem to be realizing that individual meditative practice may be inappropriate or less manageable in a family setting. For those looking to move beyond an individual meditative practice to a Buddhism that can be shared with a family, Jōdo Shinshū stands ready. Those who call or come to a temple asking only about meditation are already a self-selected population. There may be many looking for another kind of Buddhism who do not think to

call. I suspect that an advertising campaign in local newspapers, introducing Jōdo Shinshū as a family-based Buddhism, including Dharma School for kids, would draw quite a number of interested people.

This is not to say that there is nothing that Jōdo Shinshū temples need to do. Both for their current members and potential converts, temples remain faced with the perennial problem of making the nenbutsu and the teaching of shinjin relevant to people today. This might mean more experimentation with the inherently meditative aspects of nenbutsu (such as encouraging more nenbutsu retreats, or incorporating extended nenbutsu chanting into weekly services). Additionally, Shinshū concepts may need to be explained in relation to their greater Mahayana context, balancing traditional interpretation with aspects that appeal to modern concerns. Shinjin, for example, typically explained as “faith” or “entrusting,” could also be explained in terms of the idea of “mind” (*shin-jin*: “entrusting-mind”) that is an equal part of the concept. Discussing mind from a Jōdo Shinshū point of view would both appeal to modern interests in this Buddhist concept and help to deepen understanding of the Shin teachings on the relationship between the individual and Amida.

Discussing the issues, both doctrinal and sociological, that surround nenbutsu and meditative practices brings forward the tasks facing Shin temples in terms of growth and dealing with new members. While suggestions for change may remain controversial, they also spur thoughtful reflections on the teachings, practices, and roles of Jōdo Shinshū and Buddhism in America.

NOTES

1. On the issue of defining meditative and devotional practices, see Daniel B. Stevenson, "Pure Land Buddhist Worship and Meditation in China," in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 359–379.
2. In the early Edo period, Jōdo Shinshū had an inclusive attitude toward various Buddhist practices; see Eisho Nasu, "Ecumenical Understandings of Jōdo Shinshū and Possibilities for the Development of a Practical Theory of Practice," *Pacific World*, forthcoming. On Zen inclusion and then rejection of nenbutsu practices, see Richard Jaffe, "Ungo Kiyō's *Ōjōyōka* and Rinzai Zen Orthodoxy," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitābha*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, Kuroda Institute, 2004), pp. 202–235.
3. On the development of buddhānusmṛti in India, see Paul Harrison, "Commemoration and Identification in *Buddhānusmṛti*," in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Janet Gyatso (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 215–238. However, recent work by Harrison also points out that these meditative techniques should not be seen as distinct from other aspects of Buddhist practice and teaching, such as the development of text and the practice of chanting. See Harrison, "Mediums and Messages: Reflections on the Production of Mahāyāna Sūtras," *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s. 35, nos. 1 & 2 (2003): pp. 115–151.
4. Stevenson, "Pure Land Buddhist Worship," p. 366.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 368.
6. On the development of the *jōgyō zanmai*, see Honen's Senchakushū: *Passages on the Selection of the Nembutsu in the Original Vow* (Senchaku hongān nembutsu shū), trans. and ed. with an introduction by Senchakushū English Translation Project (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), p. 3; see also Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), p. 33.
7. Honen's Senchakushū, pp. 3–4.
8. Jacqueline Stone, "By the Power of One's Last Nenbutsu: Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss* (see note 2), p. 80.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
10. Richard Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan, 500–1600* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 203–204.

11. On Ippen's nenbutsu and the Jishū, see Dennis Hirota, *No Abode: The Record of Ippen* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986). The *Ippen hijiri-e* records that, the first time Ippen spontaneously broke into his dancing nenbutsu, "...Ippen began dancing, and many monks and laypeople gathered, all making their bonds with the Dharma by joining in the dance" (Hirota, p. xxxix). Monks were also the main dancing nenbutsu performers in the marketplace. Stage-like covered platforms were built in areas frequented by Ippen and his followers; but, as depicted in the pictures of the *Hijiri-e*, the performance of the dancing nenbutsu on these platforms seems to have been limited to the monks of the Jishū, not laypeople (see for example illustration 8 in Hirota, p. 128; for explanation, see Hirota, pp. xix and xl). Ippen was certainly concerned with spreading his nenbutsu teaching to the common people, but there was also a strong monastic component to his activities, as evidenced by the growth of the Jishū as a monastic institution after Ippen's death.
12. Robert Morrell, *Early Kamakura Buddhism: A Minority Report* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1987), pp. 89–90.
13. James Sanford, "Amida's Secret Life: Kakuban's *Amida Hishaku*," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss* (see note 2), p. 132.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
15. Mark Unno, *Shingon Refractions: Myōe and the Mantra of Light* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), p. 67.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
17. The reformulation of Buddhist practice and doctrine, however, should not necessarily be understood as a radical break with previous forms of Japanese Buddhism, such as the Tendai and Shingon, but as continuations of problems that had already been addressed to some degree within these other schools—and continued to be addressed by them as well. On the issues addressed by these reformulations, and how to conceive of the new Kamakura teachings in relation to Tendai et al., see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 228–236.
18. *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanjiha, 1997), p. 463.
19. On the state of this doctrine (that the mind of sentient beings are equal to the mind of the Buddha) in the late Heian and Kamakura periods, see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 190–99.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 88–90.
21. Carl Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 175. Bielefeldt also points out how this rhetoric of universal enlightenment has its roots in China (from which the

medieval Tendai discourse in Japan was developed). See Bielefeldt's comments on this passage, pp. 125–126.

22. Carl Bielefeldt, "Practice," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 230–231.

