

Birth in the Pure Land
Rev. Kazunori Takahashi

In Jodo Shin Buddhism, we learn that we will be born in the Pure Land and become a Buddha at the end of life through the compassionate working of Amida Buddha. This is an essential part of the teachings. However, once someone gave me comments as follows. "Sensei, I understand that it's important to learn about the Pure Land, but I don't know how this teaching is related to our everyday lives. I want to learn the teachings for the present rather than for afterlife." Have you ever had this kind of questions? In point of fact, this teaching is not only to learn our afterlife but also to give us the firm strength for our everyday lives.

Once I was reminded of this teaching by some experience. I often use an airplane for my business trips. Then I sometimes meet my acquaintances at an airport or a cabin by chance. In such a case, I say hello and have a conversation asking, "Where are you going?" "How long will you stay there," etc. I guess you also have this kind of experience. Needless to say, we always buy a plane ticket before a trip and take a right airplane. Therefore, we may say, "I will go to Honolulu," or "I will go to the mainland after I change airplane", etc. I'm sure that nobody will answer, "I have no idea of where I am going." Also a captain on the airplane never says, "I don't know where this airplane is heading for." If we hear such an announcement, we would be extremely anxious about the plane ride.

The same applies for our human lives. It is significant for us to know where our destination is. Though it's difficult for us to accept, all of us will come to an end of our life in this world. In addition, we cannot avoid separating from those we love. Some people may look away from reality or try not to think about it. However, we can learn the truth of human lives and how to live our lives. In such a human life, it is truly significant to know that we will be born in Amida Buddha's Pure Land after this life. This teaching becomes our firm strength to fully live in the present.

Shinran Shonin said: **The ocean of birth-and-death, of painful existence, has no bound; Only by the ship of Amida's universal Vow can we, who have long been drowning, unflinchingly be brought across it.**

(Hymns of the Pure Land Masters: *Collected works of Shinran*, p. 363)

He teaches us that we cannot reach the Pure Land by ourselves because we have the sources of suffering of birth and death. However, he also teaches us that Amida Buddha unflinchingly saves us, comparing his working with the ship.

When we ride a plane, we can see the beautiful sceneries. On the contrary, a plane sometimes goes through thick clouds or roll heavily in the turbulence. Yet, we can ride it because we entrust our heart to a pilot and are sure that it will certainly reach a destination.

In our lives, we encounter different kind of events. However, if we are aware that Amida Buddha is always working for us with his wisdom and compassion and certainly takes us to the Pure Land, we can live our everyday lives with not anxiety but peace of mind. In addition, it gives us our life direction.

We always recite "Namo Amida Butsu." "Namo" means "entrust." "Amida Butsu" means "Amida Buddha." Amida Buddha is always calling us "Entrust your heart to me." When we say "Namo Amida Butsu", it means "I entrust my heart to Amida Buddha." Let us live our daily lives with Namo Amida Butsu.