

Going and Returning
By Reverend Kazunori Takahashi

Once someone asked me a question regarding one of Shinran Shonin's teachings as follows. "Sensei, I have one question. I learned we will be born in the Pure Land and become a Buddha after this life by entrusting our heart to Amida Buddha's working. However, I always hear, "The deceased reached the Pure Land" even at the funeral for those who had never come to the temple and listened to the teaching. I'm certain that they didn't entrust their heart to Amida Buddha. How can you tell they had also reached the Pure Land? I feel something contradictory."

We cannot avoid parting from those we love, such as family, friends, etc. We would understand this truth intellectually. However, it would be very hard for us to accept it when we encounter the separation. Then people would wonder where they had gone or what they are doing right now. The question someone asked me was also about our destination.

As he pointed out, Shinran Shonin said, **"Entrusting ourselves to the inconceivable Buddha-wisdom is taught to me the cause of birth in the fulfill land."**

(Hymns of the Dharma-Ages: Collected Works of Shinran, p.410)

However, there are some people who had never had a chance to listen to the teaching. You may also wonder where they went. In Jodo Shin Buddhism, however, there is a teaching that enables us to realize that they also reached the Pure Land and became the Buddha. According to Shinran Shonin, Amida Buddha's working has two aspects: the aspect for our going forth to the Pure Land and the aspect for our return to this world to teach and guide all beings as Bodhisattva.

Once some minister talked about this teaching, and I was deeply impressed by it. "Some people lose a little baby who had never come to the temple and recited the Nembutsu. If we follow the teaching which requires efforts or conditions to go to a peaceful place, the deceased baby cannot be saved. However, if we think, "Because of the deceased baby, I started listening to the teaching, putting our hands together and reciting the Nembutsu," we would consider the baby as a Bodhisattva from the Pure Land. Jodo Shinshu provides us the teaching to enable us to consider and respect all deceased as Bodhisattva guiding us."

Shinran Shonin said: **"Amida has fulfilled the directing of virtue, which has two aspects: that for our going forth and that for our return. Through these aspects of the Buddha's directing of virtue, we are brought to realize both mind and practice."**

(Hymns of the Pure Land Masters: Collected Works of Shinran, p.370)

When we part from those we love, we would reflect on the meaning of this life and the impermanence of this world. Shinran Shonin considered some people as "accommodative virtue" (*gonke no nin*), which means incarnate body of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva to guide and save him.

This month, we will have the Obon observance which is held in memory of departed people. We would consider this opportunity as the important lesson to walk the right path, given by departed loved ones. Let us continue listening to the teaching of Nembutsu. Namo Amida Butsu.