

New Year's Greeting
By Reverend Kazunori Takahashi

At the beginning of 2018, I would like to express my greetings for the New Year. Thanks to you, your help and support, Lihue Hongwanji was able to hold various services and activities last year. Let me take this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to all of you. I humbly ask you to continue supporting Lihue Hongwanji this year.

Through various services and activities, I have had a lot of opportunities to talk about Buddhism with many people. At those times, I sometimes hear the following: "Sensei, I prefer to think of Buddhism more as a way of life than a religion. We always learn the teachings, but I think it is important to practice what we learn in our everyday lives." Have you ever had this kind of thoughts? Actually, our school offers a clear idea of how we should live our lives with the Jodo Shinshu teachings as follows:

Guided by the teaching of Shinran Shonin, we shall listen to the compassionate calling of Amida Tathagata and recite the Nembutsu. While always reflecting on ourselves, amidst our feelings of regret and joy, we shall live expressing our gratitude without depending on petitionary prayer and superstition.

(Jodo Shinshu Service Book, p.viii)

In this passage, the importance of reflecting on ourselves is emphasized. When I think about the teaching of "self-reflection," I always remember the words of Master Shan-*tao* (613-681), one of the seven masters who Shinran Shonin deeply respected. He said, "**The teaching of the sutras is like a mirror.**" I think you look at yourself in a mirror every day when you wash your face, groom yourself, shave your mustache, etc. If there is something on your face, you can remove it; since you might feel ashamed if your appearance is not decent.

We can see our appearance with the mirror, but we cannot see the state of our minds. Just as our appearance becomes messy when we don't care about it, our minds would be messy sometimes. We sometimes get mad, grumble, and are disturbed when we encounter unfavorable situations. In such cases, we might think that we suffer because of other people or unfortunate situations around us. However, Buddhism teaches us that we cause our sufferings because of our blind passions. That is to say, through listening to the teaching of Buddhism, we can reflect on ourselves. It is not always pleasant to know our own nature. However, if we notice the state of our minds, we would be able to adjust it.

When the mirror reflects us, it collects light and we can see ourselves. Likewise, through remembering that the light of wisdom always illuminates us, we can check the state of our minds. Shinran Shonin said: **The light of wisdom exceeds all measure, and every finite living being receives this illumination that is like the dawn, so take refuge in Amida, the true and real light.**

(Hymns of the Pure Land, Collected Works of Shinran, p.325)

Let us continue listening to the teaching of Nembutsu and live our everyday lives peacefully this year. Namo Amida Butsu.