

MON

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Hearing and Gate

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*"People are to be cherished as priceless
-not worshipped as great."*

Yasuda Rijin, Shin Buddhist Priest (1900–1982)





INTERVIEW 05

Zhang Yuye

Chinese language instructor; M.A., Otani University

Ms. Zhang came to Japan for the first time at the age of 19 as an exchange student at a Japanese university. When she visited Kyoto, the first thing she saw upon leaving Kyoto Station was the Higashi Honganji. Surprised at the impressive temple precincts with its huge buildings, she entered the grounds. While sitting on a hall's veranda and gazing at the drifting clouds, her thoughts turned to her overseas study experience, mixed with hopes and fears. She asked herself, "What will become of me in the future?" That question is an important research theme for her even now.

Zhang Yuye is from Jiangxi Province, located in the central area of China. Her father is a company manager and her mother is a devoted follower of Pure Land Buddhism. A class in high school sparked her interest in Japan. In that class she studied Japanese culture, especially tea ceremony and flower arrangement, and she came to admire Japan. After graduating from high school, she went on to a Chinese university. In her first year, she was able to attend a Japanese university for a half-year of language study as an exchange student. After that, she enrolled as a regular student in the Japanese university where she previously had

studied as an exchange student, and studied there for four years. That university was a Buddhist-affiliated university, so she was blessed with the chance to study in particular about Honen of the Pure Land denomination. She found herself fascinated by Japanese Buddhism, perhaps because her mother is a devoted Buddhist, and because she came in contact with the ethnic consciousness of the Japanese people that was deeply influenced by Buddhism. Through Honen she encountered Shinran, and then Shin Buddhism.

In her fourth year of university, she chose *akunin shōki*, that is, "the wicked person is the true object of Buddhist salvation" [as expressed in Shinran's saying, "Even a good person will be born in the Pure Land; how much more so an evil person!"] as her graduation thesis topic. Looking back on herself at that time, she said, "I was haughty, and convinced that I was clever." She says of China today that there is too much stress on economic growth. As a result it has become a competitive society concerned only with winners and losers, and this is affecting her hometown as well.

By studying Shinran's teachings, she came to understand that she realized

that "I'm living because of everyone around me, it is thanks to them I am alive."

"Not by birth is one a brahman, not by birth a non-brahman. By action is one a brahman. By action one is a non-brahman." (Buddha no kotoba [Sayings of the Buddha], by Nakamura Hajime, Iwanami Shoten.) Ms. Zhang treasures these words of the Buddha.

She aspired to study the teachings of Shin Buddhism further, and continue her research as an academic discipline, so after graduating from university she entered the master's course of the Otani University graduate school. Shinran's Buddhist spirit is the basis of education and research at Otani University, which began as the Higashi Honganji's student dormitory. Here she sought to pursue deeply the questions about her own life that she had harbored up to now.

Ms. Zhang has completed the master's course and is now studying intensively to take the entrance test next spring for the doctoral course at Otani University graduate school. She said forcefully in the future she is determined to continue her research to answer the questions she had when she first visited Kyoto and endeavors to pursue the path of truth.



The Donation Boxes

There is a large wooden box under the Founder's Hall Gate (Goei-dō Mon 影堂門) at the Higashi Honganji. Such boxes, which seem to contain money, are placed within the two halls, at the foot of each hall's front steps, and elsewhere in the temple precincts. They are called "donation boxes." People who come to worship put donations into them, and gently place their hands together in gasshō 合掌. Giving alms is a common practice in Christianity and other religions, but what does it mean for believers in Buddhism to give alms?

In Mahayana Buddhism, which emphasizes "togetherness," the most important practice is called "offering" (fuse 布施). This means "sharing," and also could be called "charity," or "giving away with pleasure" (kisyā 喜捨). It is the teaching that being of service to others brings joy. The act of putting money into a donation box when worshipping at a temple conforms to this teaching of charity.

We believe subconsciously that give and take must be of equal value.

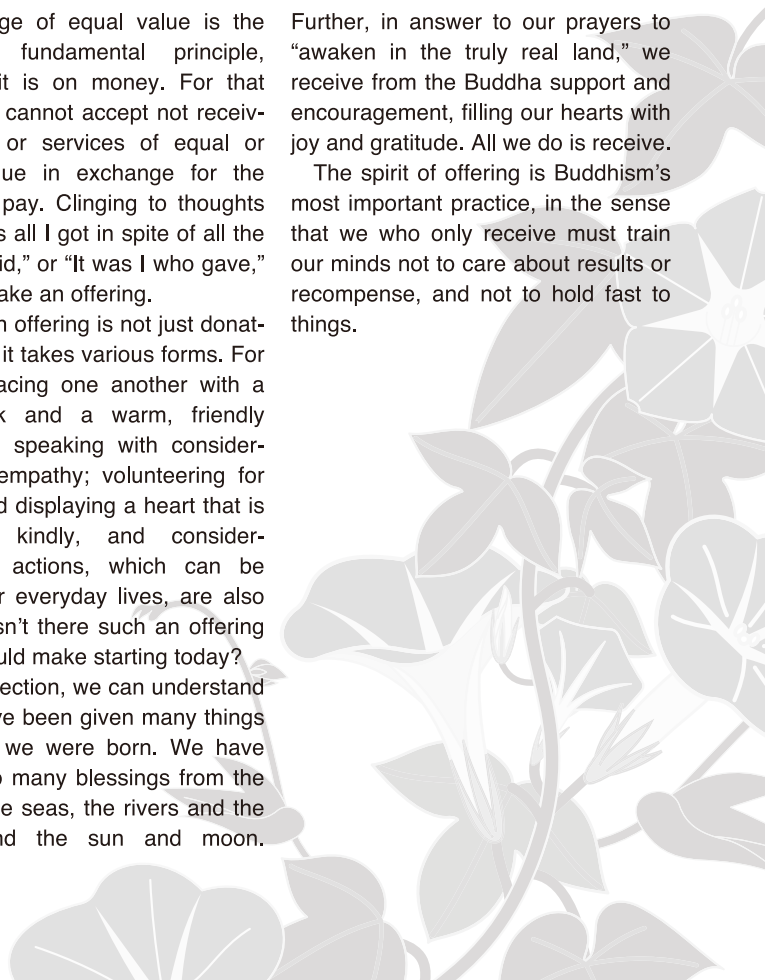
An exchange of equal value is the economy's fundamental principle, based as it is on money. For that reason, we cannot accept not receiving goods or services of equal or greater value in exchange for the money we pay. Clinging to thoughts like, "This is all I got in spite of all the money I paid," or "It was I who gave," does not make an offering.

In fact, an offering is not just donating money, it takes various forms. For example, facing one another with a gentle look and a warm, friendly expression; speaking with consideration and empathy; volunteering for service; and displaying a heart that is thoughtful, kindly, and considerate—these actions, which can be seen in our everyday lives, are also offerings. Isn't there such an offering that you could make starting today?

Upon reflection, we can understand that we have been given many things ever since we were born. We have received so many blessings from the land and the seas, the rivers and the forests, and the sun and moon.

Further, in answer to our prayers to "awaken in the truly real land," we receive from the Buddha support and encouragement, filling our hearts with joy and gratitude. All we do is receive.

The spirit of offering is Buddhism's most important practice, in the sense that we who only receive must train our minds not to care about results or recompense, and not to hold fast to things.





05 The Yoshimizu Hermitage An'yōji

A Pilgrimage to Historic Sites Related to Shinran's Life

The Yoshimizu hermitage An'yōji, located in a corner of Maruyama Park, is a temple with a long history. It was founded at the time the Enryakuji was established on Mount Hiei in the late eighth century. At one time it was a great temple compound that included all of Maruyama Park in its precincts. Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263) sought instruction here from Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), who had made this place his base to expound his teachings over many decades. At present what remains of those times are just the Main Hall and a shrine devoted to Benzaiten (the Hindu goddess Saraswati). Next to the Benzaiten shrine is the site of a spring called the Yoshimizu well, which tradition says Hōnen favored. The origin of this area's name, Yoshimizu, "splendid water," comes from the high-quality water of this spring.

Hōnen was born in 1133 in present-day Okayama Prefecture. In obedience to his father's dying wish, he entered the priesthood at age fifteen to study the Buddhist teachings. As he continued his training, with the passage of time he was increasingly drawn to the

teaching that "all sentient beings can be saved equally by reciting the Buddha name nenbutsu 念仏." Determined to follow that path, he moved to Yoshimizu and began to preach to people earnestly. His teaching of Buddha name nenbutsu soon spread to people of all social classes, from aristocrats to commoners.

When Shinran first sought out Hōnen at Yoshimizu, Shinran was twenty-nine years old and Hōnen sixty-nine. It is said that when a Buddhist monk obtains the mind of faith, his very presence radiates the expounding of the Buddhist Law—Hōnen was such a person to Shinran. It is likely Shinran had already heard of Hōnen's Buddha name nenbutsu teaching while at Mount Hiei. However, he must have felt ashamed that his Buddhist understanding was nothing more than book knowledge. It was necessary for him to meet a great living personality such as Hōnen to convert his knowledge into faith. It was here at Yoshimizu that Shinran met Hōnen and revered him as a person of higher spirituality. Putting his trust in Hōnen, Shinran knew there was no other path in life but to follow him.

An'yōji

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