

## Chapter V

### *Nehan, Nirvana and Bodai, enlightenment*

How and at what moment in the course of the practice for Buddhahood can one achieve *Nehan* and *Bodai*?

It is at *Nehan*, Nirvana, and *Bodai*, enlightenment, that Shakyamuni Buddha sets the ultimate goal for us to achieve. The teachings of the Buddha show us the way to Nirvana and enlightenment. Nirvana means infinite life and permanent peace. *Bodai* means perfect spirituality. Permanent peace signifies a state of mind, which enables one to enjoy undisturbed peace and taste the joy of life to one's heart's content.

The devotion to the practice of Nembutsu is the path to attain *Nehan*, complete annihilation, and *Bodai*, supreme enlightenment. I shall now explain the way in which you are able to achieve *Nehan* and *Bodai* through recourse to the Nembutsu practice. Let me cite a piece of poetry by Hōnen Shōnin to elucidate my statement. The poem reads as follows: "It is my sole aspiration to receive a welcome from Buddha, so I never let even a day pass without freshening the wish of my heart."

Shōnin obviously applied himself to the Nembutsu practice with his heart filled with the longing to be close to Nyorai, just as the vines of a mallow entwine themselves about the tree trunks. This is the import of his poem quoted above, and the reference to the mallow is a poetical device used to liken his earnest desire to be with Nyorai to the behavior of mallow vines.

It is only natural for a human being to feel a longing towards men of high virtue. As you see more and more of a man of rare virtue, you will come under his moral influence. Suppose a great mind like Confucius be alive today, he would certainly become the

object of international adoration, and if the Buddha were in this world now all and every one of us would be ready to go all the way to realize our aspiration to welcome Him. Those who knew Ben-nei Seija in his life time adored him in the same frame of mind, which I shared.

How much more so would it be with Nyorai, who is the creator and parent of all things and beings, saviour and teacher endowed with every noble virtue. He is our veritable father, who dedicated all his life to unremitting effort to redeem us, and to bring up each of us with tenderest care into a perfect being after His own model, as if each were His own child. He is truly the wisdom and compassion incarnate.

It is simply fair and proper for a human being to aspire to receive a welcome from a venerable and compassionate One like Nyorai. Our father who takes compassion on us all will grant our wish in ready compliance with our supplication. It is natural for us to long for our loving parent to give us a welcome, who enlivens our spirit by shedding His light of grace upon us. There could be no greater blessing than to be able to bathe in the light of Nyorai, who is always ready to grant our wish to receive a welcome from him.

Hōnen Shōnin gives expression in a poem to the joy he felt, when his wish was granted, as follows :

“How happy I am to be able to witness  
the beautiful sight of  
The Pure Land with all its shōgon (magnificence)  
By merely performing the invocation of  
The sacred name of Amida Buddha !”

*Shōgon*, or Magnificence, when used in reference to the Pure Land signifies sublimity, nobility and elegance all combined.

Some of you may make comment wedgewise interpreting the poem as an expression of the joy he will feel in witnessing the magnificent sight of the Pure Land after death, performing the

Nembutsu with a hope for happiness in the days to come. In that case, however, the wording should have been something like “how happy I should be if I were able to ——” instead of “how happy I am to be able to ——” as it stands in the poem.

Or others among you may put it down as a slip in the pen on the part of the poet who says “I am ——” when he should have said “I should be ——.” But then Hōnen Shōnin was a past master who enjoyed an established reputation as a poet. It is absolutely inconceivable that he should have allowed himself to commit such a verbal blunder. The poem is in no way an expression of his hope for a future life. It is a poem in which he described the fact of life he personally experienced. He was happy to have witnessed a magnificent sight of the Pure Land.

Why was it such a great joy for him to be able to receive a welcome from Nyorai? If one feels cheerful as one sees more and more of a person of high virtue, how much more so may he feel when he is allowed to be forever with an exalted One like Nyorai? If it is not until we end our days after having devoted thirty or even fifty long years of our life to the practice of Nembutsu, that we are able to receive a welcome from Nyorai, none of us would think seriously of applying ourselves to repetition of the sacred name of Amida Buddha. There is an old saying that dead men tell no tales.

If we are unable to be with the Buddha until after our life ends, there could be no evidence available to show the existence of the Buddha. It is not in order to attain the Pure Land after our death that we devote to the Nembutsu practice. The truth is that each time we chant a word of prayer to Amida Buddha, thanks to His compassionate aid, we make a step forward on our way to the world of Nirvana. After we have accumulated merits through practicing the Nembutsu, we are enabled to reach the world of Nirvana in our life time without fail, and being awakened to infinite life and permanent peace, we can witness the beautiful sight of the Pure Land with all its magnificence.

Once again I shall quote a passage from Hōnen Shōnin’s writ-

ings, in which the joy he felt on receiving a welcome from Nyorai is described. It reads :

While unenlightened in my former state  
The Nembutsu repetition I did ne'er abate  
Until at last I achieved an infinite life —

To my Shōhōbō,  
on the eleventh day of the twelfth month.

Genkū (signed)

The verse describes how he was able to get released from his former unenlightened state through the ceaseless practice of Nembutsu and achieve an infinite life. *Mushōnin* signifies the conviction of the endlessness, while *Mushō*, which literally means non-birth or the state which never allows death, is in *Ōhara mondō* (a history of the discussion at Ōhara) identified with *Ōjō* (rebirth in the Pure Land immediately following bodily death.)

On attaining an infinite life, we enter the realm where neither birth nor death occurs. In other words we reach the state of *Mushō*, for the conviction of the endlessness spells the achievement of an infinite life. Human life is as evanescent as a dew drop, and comes to its end before one attains an infinite life. It is a life destined to come to an end sooner or later, but you can achieve an infinite life, when you receive a welcome from Nyorai.

Ben-nei the Sage explains the truth for our sake, by stating that as we continue to repeat the sacred name of Amida, with a single-minded yearning after Him, our voice will never fail to reach Nyorai, who is the incarnate Universe and father to us all. He will appear at His abode on the central zenith of the cosmos and at the same time right in front of us in person, just as He does in His principal image here. (Pointing at the image of the Buddha)

Nyorai is present everywhere and reveals himself, full of insight, as ever in that painted likeness, for your sake. For He is omnipresent, all-seeing and omniscient. When we bow to Him in worship, He

takes a compassionate look at us. As we repeat the holy name, He is ready to listen to our voice, because He is there and knows that we offer the prayer in adoration of him, so that our prayer does not remain unheard.

When a deep affection one has for another remains unreciprocated, it is often likened to the attachment of an abalone, for the shell attaches itself to the cold rock in the sea. The yearning we feel for Nyorai, however, is in no way such a one-sided affair. When we call the sacred name in adoration of Him and throw ourselves on His compassion, Nyorai is ready to give us so many times more consideration and affection than we do, in appreciation of our effort to follow His precepts. It is not an unreturned love.

At first you may not be able to see the sacred appearance of Nyorai, but when *Egen* and *Hōgen* are opened you can witness His holy appearance. You do not have to worry too much, however, even if you are unable to see Him at present. The important thing is for you to apply yourself to the practice of Nembutsu, with a firm belief in His presence in front of you, and a yearning after His appearance. Those who are still unable to envisage the sacred appearance of the compassionate Nyorai, are advised to contemplate the holy likeness of the Buddha enshrined in the temple and give yourself up to the Nembutsu, watching Him hard until you may begin even to feel pain in the nape.

It sometimes happens that, as we give ourselves up to invocation of Amida Buddha, fastening our eyes on His portrait in the belief that Nyorai is present in it, we feel as if we were falling into a doze. When, on pulling ourselves together, we fix our gaze on the holy portrait afresh, we experience an unaccountable impact on our heart. It is then that we are awakened to the truth that it is not His likeness but the living Nyorai Himself whom we are looking at. Then the drowsiness we feel is not a beginning of sleep of ordinary kind but an indication of the initial state of Samadhi.

As it is, the concentration being still far from perfect, we feel drowsy and therefore we are only able to see the sacred appearance

of Nyorai only dimly. As we pull ourselves together with renewed effort to fasten our eyes on Him, we can reach the state of Samadhi, in which we are able to see a dear vision of the living Nyorai. It is *Hōgen* that enables us to see Him. However, in case we allow ourselves to continue idly in the state of drowsiness, we will end in really falling asleep.

When you reach the stage in which you have access to the living Nyorai, and are in constant contact with the Holy One whom you adore with true devotion, the very mind that concentrates itself on repetition of the sacred name of Amida Buddha is identified with the infinite life you have attained.

At this some of you may say with a cynical turn of expression that it would hardly be possible for the likes of us common mortals to win a welcome from Nyorai. But it is not only you: a number of well-educated men of name have unsparingly harassed me with all sorts of critical remarks. But the Buddha is ready to give us a warm welcome, because He is our prime parent. You are allowed to meet him.

In the writings by Zendō Daishi there is a well-known phrase which reads as follows; “all of the common mortals should turn their thought towards it, then they would be able to see.” “Seeing” here is obviously means seeing the Buddha, judging from the context in which the word is used.

Zendō Daishi means to say that no matter how ignorant they may be, they have good reason to hope that Nyorai would give them a welcome, provided they supplicate His compassion from heart and soul. What he means when referring to “reason” is that Nyorai Himself bestows upon them such powers as are called *Sammaijō-riki*, the power of Samadhi endowed by Buddha, *Honkudoku-riki*, the power of virtue or merits of a pious act and *Daiseigan-riki*, the power of the vows. That is to say, there is little hope for common mortals of their wish being granted as long as they rely on the power natural to them. It is not until they throw themselves on His compassion that they can receive a welcome from Nyorai. Zendō Daishi states the

facts as he experienced them in person.

Hōnen Shōnin is quite positive that Daishi's statement is no second-hand description of religious experiences that are recounted in the sutras. Being firmly persuaded that his statement is indisputable, whatever those savants of high pretensions might say against it, we never hesitate to repose faith in it. Zendō Daishi and Hōnen Shōnin are indeed among the greatest minds of unsurpassed virtue and wisdom the world has ever produced.

When you attain the state of complete concentration of thought, you will be capable of seeing a vision of the sacred appearance of the compassionate Nyorai even on a white wall at which you happen to take a look. Even as you view a wood thickly covered with foliage, or a range of hills, you will be able to witness a sacred figure of Nyorai in full size as large as the wood or the range of hills. It is the appearance of the Nyorai of the Pure Land. You must not attribute it to the sheer power of memory. It is Nyorai Himself, who appears to give you a welcome to His Pure Land.

The statement may invite a protest from some of you, who would say that they can hardly believe it is the living Nyorai when he does not deign to show them a smile or preach them a sermon. It is merely because they have not yet outgrown their puerile habit of thinking and apt to view the matter in that light.

A newborn baby is hardly able to see things clearly or hear sounds distinctly ; it can only perceive dim lightness or gloom. But as it grows up, fed on mother's milk, it learns to hear sounds more distinctly. It still can hardly tell that the mother is its best possible benefactor, as it is reared at her breast. But it will get its power of memory developed by degrees until it learns to recognize its mother on looking at her for a second time, and to smile at the sight of its benefactor. However, the mother has been watching the infant with her loving eyes, before it learns to recognize her as its nicest friend.

In just the same way, whereas Nyorai is present right before you from the first, watching you with His benevolent eyes, you remain unaware of His presence, only because you are still in your infancy.

Then the important thing for you is to devote yourself to the practice of Nembutsu in adoration of Nyorai so that you may be close to Him. For the Nyorai you can picture in your mind is the Nyorai of the Pure Land.

On some occasions He will let His light and beam of dawn seen to you, just before you reach the last stage in which you are blessed with His full light of grace. Some may be let to see it, though it is not the case with all of you. It is an indication of His intention to encourage you to make your final effort. In case you can only see a spot of pure translucency as small as a coin, or a mere glimmer, at first, you are to take it as Nyorai's admonition for you to confess your sins with penitence.

By virtue of penance which you do from your whole heart, you may be able to see the light increase in radiance and its circle grow as wide as the sun until it spreads all over the horizon.

Mr. Tsunejiro Nakai, former professor of mechanical engineering at Kyoto University, was initiated in the practice of Nembutsu under the guidance of Ben-nei Seija. So, making use of the annual leave of absence a professor was entitled to, he decided to devote his few days' off entirely to the practice of Nembutsu and let go no opportunity to participate in a gathering for the community Nembutsu to apply himself to the practice for Buddhahood. He kept his resolution and attended about five assemblies for the Nembutsu practice. Each assembly lasted three or five days during that year.

One day in December of that year, while absorbed in repetition of the sacred name of Amida Buddha, he happened to get a sight of bamboo leaves coloured by gem-like spots of red and blue light. It proved to be *Myōsō*, a streak of dawn, though not a light of grace in the legitimate sense of the word. To be exact it was an aspect of dawn, that is to say, coloured lucency. This is an indication of Nyorai's intention to encourage you to make a step farther, before you can receive His full light of grace in the true sense of the word. And when you progress a step forwards and are blessed with His light in virtue of single-minded devotion to Nembutsu practice you



attain rebirth in the Pure Land.

A sacred hymn entitled *Nembutsu Shichi-kakushi*, which means “The Nembutsu Practice for Attainment of Seven Qualities of Wisdom,” contains a passage which reads as follows :

The purple golden figure of our father  
Appears in the far-reaching radiance of a circular nimbus,

His holy image of incomparable uprightness,  
Cherish it in your mind, repeating of His sacred name,

The chaos of all idle thoughts and confused concepts  
Dismiss from your mind,

Then turn the thus purified mind to the Buddha,  
And meditate exclusively on Him.

And you will be able in no time to attain Samadhi  
As perfect as you can hope for.

In this way as you apply yourself single-mindedly to the practice for Buddhahood, you will immediately reach the state of Samadhi in which you can receive divine inspiration and have no longer the least doubt about the existence of the living Nyorai. You are duly rewarded for the progress you have made that far. As you get your faith still further strengthened under His thoughtful guidance, you will be able to share in the noble mind of Nyorai, which is a mind of great compassion and wisdom. In this way your faith grows by successive stages, under the fatherly care of Nyorai.

At first Nyorai addresses you by means of sensuous revelation, then representational revelation and ideal revelation in gradual succession as you grow up on His lap. The sensuous revelation supplies means to see the sacred appearance of Nyorai, to enjoy a fragrance exquisite beyond description or to feel an unspeakably

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agreeable touch on the body. The representational revelation means manifestation of His mind, a mind of boundless compassion and wisdom.

It is when you receive an ideal revelation that you reach the state in which you identify yourself with *Hosshin*, “Dharma-Kāya” the absolute nature of Buddha, by virtue of the practice for Buddhahood and achieve the peace of mind by awakening to the absolute truth. On receiving Nyorai’s light of grace in your mind, you will find it purified from all sorts of doubts. But as long as you remain unawakened, you must suffer from doubt about the existence of an infinite life.