

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
PREFACE	7
GLOSSARY OF BUDDHIST TERMS	8
COMING HOME TO JODO SHINSHU	11
<i>Sara Jotoku</i>	
WHERE THE HEART AND HOME ARE ONE	19
<i>John J. DiGilio</i>	
THE WAY TO THE DHARMA THROUGH TAIKO	25
<i>Cheral Tsuchiya</i>	
FINDING MY WAY HOME, I TOOK A WINDING PATH...	29
<i>Rev. David Quirke</i>	
COMING HOME TO EKOJI	37
<i>Andrea Chapman</i>	
OVERCOMING FEAR, ENCOUNTERING THE NEMBUTSU	41
<i>David Belcheff</i>	
HEAR THE STORY! HEAR THE CALLING!	45
<i>Richard Ito</i>	
MY WAY HOME	51
<i>Sara Perrott</i>	
MOVING BACK TO MY NEW HOME	57
<i>Ricardo Nishimura</i>	
THE BEGINNINGS OF A MEANDERING PATH	65
<i>Rev. Michael Jones</i>	
MY JOURNEY TO JODO SHINSHU BUDDHISM	73
<i>James McQuillan</i>	
BORN INTO JODO SHINSHU VERSUS LIVING IT!	77
<i>Darlene Bagshaw</i>	

PREFACE

In my recent move to San Francisco, CA, I had to stop and consider what it meant to call a place home. People, places, things—these can all give us a sense of belonging and safety but when they change, as all things do, is there a place we can still call ours, no matter how unfamiliar it may get?

As you read through this collection of essays from authors spread out across our country and even the world, I hope you connect with their words and stories and find meaning in their experiences. It is through experience and reflection that our faith deepens and we find new and meaningful ways to entrust in the Vow of Amida Buddha.

What you will find in these essays is whether we practice in a temple or somewhere else, home is not restricted to four walls and a roof- our home always will be in the Nembutsu and in that way, we carry home in our heart.

Please enjoy their heartfelt words and may it too lead you home.

Rev. Melissa Opel
Buddhist Church of San Francisco

Where the Heart and Home are One

John J. DiGilio

The old saying “home is where the heart is” has always seemed a bit shortsighted to me. It assumes that the heart and the home are two separate things and that it is the proximity of one to the other that determines whether the criteria for what constitutes a home is met. In a world marked by impermanence and constant change, proximity and place are shaky ground on which to build a foundation for what we consider “home.” To me, it had to be something bigger, something more encompassing of all our experiences, ups, downs, successes, and failings. It had to be something almost as big as Amida’s compassion itself.

Having moved around so much in my life, the concept of what it means to have a “home” has long been difficult for me to express anyway. I am often asked and every time find myself taking a pause before attempting an answer. Is it where a roof is currently over my head and where I hang my literal and proverbial hat? Or was it the place where I spent eighteen summers growing up? Maybe it is the city in which I bought my first house or where my apartment is located now. The truth is that none of those answers seem to capture the true essence of my feelings. To me, the answer is and has long been all of those places

and more. This is not because my heart has been in each of them, but rather because each of them now resides here inside my heart. That is why my temple in California is now a home to me as well.

I first came to the Los Angeles Betsuin as a guest.¹ It was the day of the 2018 Hanamatsuri celebration and all of the local Buddhist temples had gathered for a day of fellowship at the Nishi temple.² After many, many years of bouncing from city to city and temple to temple, I was there with another organization in the city. Jodo Shinshu was something of which I had only heard. For over twenty years I had been practicing Zen and dabbling in some of the more esoteric branches of Buddhism. It seemed like I was always chasing after something that was ultimately beyond my grasp and so I guess I can say that I was feeling both unfulfilled and rather perplexed.

That day, I heard the Nishi minister speak and had the opportunity to meet with many of the members of the temple. Their warmth was refreshing, as was the joy they seemed to bring to everything they were doing to host so many of us in their own backyard. Most importantly, that was the day that I learned about Amida and the Original Vow for the very first time.³ Suffice it to say that something just clicked. I knew then and there that I was coming back the next Sunday and then the Sunday after that. It's now been five years of Sundays and I have taken the steps to become a minister's assistant. The Betsuin is now truly in

my heart and thus my home. I could tell a polite fib and say it was an easy transition. But the truth is that it did take some work—work that was made easier and enjoyable by the Dharma family that I have found here.

My father used to always tell my sisters and I that home is what we make of it. He had become disabled at a very young age and our family struggled to make ends meet on my mom's modest salary. The things my parents taught us about making a home were simple, yet powerful enough to ensure our happiness no matter the size of the place we were living in or the material effects with which we were surrounded. These were lessons in gratitude and love in the very face of difficulty, discomfort, and hardship. They were the same lessons that I would hear week after week at the Betsuin as well. It was as though I was raised in the very Dharma of Jodo Shinshu. It felt familiar. My life experiences validated what I was learning and the teachings helped me make sense of this life itself.

When you grow up with little, gratitude teaches you to truly appreciate what you have and to recognize the many hands and hardships that were necessary for you to have it. The fact that it is so central to the Jodo Shinshu way of life made me feel right at home. It was like an instant connection for me. Opening my heart to Amida's message of gratitude gave me an appreciation for the generous work of the temple's volunteers and the many folks who took the time to make me feel welcome and to support my

new practice. It also helped me both see the need for and find satisfaction in my own contributions to my Betsuin family and friends. Finding ways to express that gratitude, including the saying of the *nembutsu*, helped to make me feel like I fit right in.

Incorporating gratitude into my daily regimen helped open my eyes to the interconnectedness we share with all of those around us. Jodo Shinshu helped me accept that though I may not be able to affect major change on my own, my actions still very much matter in a world that needs all the help it can get. Embodying the practice of interconnectedness meant not only doing my best to help others but allowing them to help me as well. This is not an easy message to digest in a society that idealizes self-sufficiency and individual success. I knew I had something special when I found myself surrounded by others that I trusted to support me in my practice and in my life. Home is where you are not afraid to feel vulnerable and not shy about the vulnerabilities displayed by others.

Being at peace with vulnerability requires that we accept ourselves and others as we are. That means finding comfort in all of our imperfections and with all of our flaws and recognizing that there is so little we can truly do on our own. Like Master Shinran, we have to come to terms with the fact that our blind passions are part and parcel of who we are in this day and age. The teachings of Jodo Shinshu on this and the story of Amida's all-encompassing

acceptance both gave me hope and helped me make sense of what felt like decades of failure in my past Buddhist practice. Making time to hear the Dharma with my friends at the temple was and remains essential to helping me understand the power and meaning of the Original Vow, the compassion that Amida represents.

When I first came to the Los Angeles Betsuin, I brought a lot of personal baggage with me. Years of fruitless efforts to find enlightenment, belief and pride in my supposed self-sufficiency, and a history of never staying in one place for too long had begun to sour my Buddhist experience and make things feel futile. Becoming part of the temple and allowing it to become such a big part of me over the years since helped me rediscover the sense of hope and peace that I enjoyed in my youth. It's a sense that continues to grow as I study, volunteer, listen, and open myself to Amida's call. I may not be baggage-free these days, but the load is certainly much lighter.

I believe now more than ever that the heart and the home are one. Freeing yourself of the notion that they are separate and that you are somehow separate is the key to such a profound awareness and comfort. Finding gratitude, seeing the connection you have to countless others, and accepting your own human limitations takes effort. Luckily, you are not alone. Your temple and your Sangha can help you. Open yourself to them, put yourself into them, and I know you, too, will feel at home.

CHAPTER NOTES

1. Betsuin: A direct branch temple of the Hongwanji in Kyoto, Japan.
2. Hanamatsuri: A celebration of the birth of the historical Buddha.
Nishi (Temple): A nickname for Los Angeles Betsuin
3. Primal Vow / Original Vow: The compassionate aspiration of Amida Buddha to embrace all beings.