

### I, Shinran, have never even once uttered the Nembutsu for the sake of my father and mother. The reason is that all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death since the birth of this universe. When I attain Buddhahood, each and every one will be saved without exception. If it could be accomplished by my own powers, then I could transfer the accumulated merits of my Nembutsu to save my father and mother. But since this is not the case, when we become free from self-power and quickly attain enlightenment, we will save those bound closest to us, no matter how deeply they are immersed in karmic suffering. (*TANNISHO, chapter 5*)

Obon is the most familiar of festivals celebrated by Buddhists. It is a dharma-gathering where we renew our thoughts about our ancestors by remembering our close relatives who have passed away.

Obon is properly called "Urabanna." Some of you probably know that the word "Ura" means "to be hanged upside down." Let's take a look at some of the causes which we have fallen into difficulties:

1. We neglect what is important and value what is not important.
2. We put off things that need to be done and hurry to do things that don't need to be done.
3. Forgetting things that need to be remembered and remembering things that should be forgotten.
4. Asking questions that don't need to be asked instead of asking questions that need to be asked.
5. I don't do what I have to do, but I try to do what I shouldn't do.

The list goes on and on. Even if you don't have a specific reason, I'm sure you can think of one.

Our suffering stems from the above-mentioned upside-down way of being. We think we are standing on our feet, but we are standing on our head in reality, so we can never get rid of our suffering.

If we just live a busy, busy life, we will never realize that we are standing on our head. Standing on one's head is unnatural, so it is several times more painful than standing correctly. As a result, we naturally complain more than those who are standing correctly.

Running around on your head during the hot summer will only make you more frustrated. Therefore, I suggest that you slow down for a couple of days at Obon and check your way of being, which is the meaning of "Ura," or "I am standing on my head, aren't I?" So, how can we check ourselves if we don't even realize that we are standing on our head? The only way is to be exposed to the correct teachings by Buddha's wisdom. It is only when we are exposed to the right teachings that we realize how upside down we are.

"Bonn" is a vessel. It means a vessel to scoop up the suffering, which means salvation.

Therefore, the "Urabanna" is a gathering where those who are standing on their heads and suffering can be saved through the correct teachings. It is exactly not an event for the dead but for the living who are suffering from standing on their heads.

During the Obon season, we visit graves and read sutras in front of the family tomb stone, so it is often perceived as a Buddhist event for the dead. However, both visiting graves and reading sutras are opportunities for us who are still alive to think about the way we are today, while paying respect to our ancestors.

Those who think that visiting graves and reciting sutras are only for the dead will be surprised when they encounter the words of Tannisho: "I, Shinran, have never even once uttered the Nembutsu for the sake of my father and mother." However, this is the original way of Buddhism.

There is no such thing in Buddhism as a way of thinking for the dead without considering one's own state as a living person.

When we say that we do not recite the Nembutsu or read the sutras for the dead, it may sound like we are mistreating our ancestors, but in reality, the act of reciting the Nembutsu or reading the sutras for the dead is mistreating our ancestors.

One should know the reason for this is that in the act of reciting sutras for the dead, there is an unconscious prayer that the dead will go to a better place. The reason we pray for them to go to a better place is because we believe that our ancestors did not go to a better place. The belief that our ancestors did not go to a better place is the reason why we pray for them in the form of Nembutsu and sutra reading.

We should remember our ancestors who headed towards the Pureland moment under the light of Buddha's wisdom who kept sending, "Namu Amitabha, we will celebrate the Urabanna." I would like to welcome the Obon Festival with great care this year as well.