



Welcome, my name is Satya. Before I start talking, I'd like to invite you to join me in a centering breath, so we can both just land. Just one slow breath.

Thank you. So earlier this week I was doing preparation for this talk, and I was looking for a quote by Shinran. Shinran lived in the Kamakura period in Japan, and he was the founder of the *Jodo Shinshu School of Pure Land Buddhism*. I'm a Pure Land Buddhist. And as I was looking through my books for the perfect quote, I heard the dogs in the living room next door wanting to go out. So, I stopped what I was doing, went to let them out, and then kept looking. Sometime later they wanted to come back in. I was not having a good time finding a quote, so I went to let them back in.

As I went to go back to my office, I noticed that Ralph, one of our little dogs, had a certain look in his eyes. Ralph came to us at seven months old, he's a little white Shih Tzu with sticky-out bottom teeth. When Ralph arrived with us, we thought he was a very placid animal, and we thought we'd really lucked out. The previous owners told us that he was very calm around cats, we have a cat. He was very calm when we first had him. But as he began to relax, he started to show the nerves that had been there all along behind the frozen exterior. He shouted and chased our cat, shouted at birds, shouted very loudly at other dogs. And he didn't know how to interact with us. He didn't get being in a relationship. He didn't know how to play; he'd never played with other dogs or with people.

So, when I let the dogs back into the living room, I thought I'd take the opportunity to see if I could progress his playing and learning a little bit more. I did my dog play crouch invite, you've probably seen dogs doing it, going down on the carpet and widening my eyes a bit. And he just looked at me as if I was a bit crazy. I thought, OK, I must have misread the signals, and I turned around to go back into my office. As I did, I heard a sound. He also went down onto the carpet with his paws stretched out looking at me with an excited look on his face. So, we had a play. Ralph chased me around the living room, I chased Ralph around the living room, we had a bit of a wrestle.

Then when he'd had enough, I thought, "OK, time to get back to work," and went back to my books. As I sat back down at my books looking for this perfect quote, I realized that what I'd been doing was looking for the quote that would make me look clever, the quote that would lead to enlightenment in the people watching, or that would at least make me look like an excellent Dharma teacher. I was quite amused that the first quote I read in the book of Shinran's quotes was this one (and this is Shinran speaking about himself):

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“I am such that I do not know right and wrong
and cannot distinguish false and true;
I lack even small love and small compassion,
And yet, for fame and profit, enjoy teaching others.”

I really love this quote, and I especially love the last line because it speaks so directly to the parts of me that also bring those mixed agendas to dharma teaching, the parts of me that yearn for fame and profit. I realized that I was in such a tangle making my preparation because I was coming entirely from a place of needing to be impressive. What I love about Shinran and Pure Land Buddhism as a whole, is that it's realistic about our nature as fallible human beings. There's a word in Pure Land Buddhism, a Japanese word, “bombyu,” which means “foolish beings of wayward passion.” When I hear it, I always imagine a cork bobbing around on the waves of greed and hate and delusion, that we're often driven by forces that we're hardly aware of.

Shinran saw this. Shinran really experienced this in his own life. He yearned to be a pure spiritual being, he was very learned, and he spent many years studying texts and learning from other teachers like his own teacher Honan. But he just kept coming up against this fact of limitedness, this fact of being flawed, of wanting to be good, and not managing it. When I read this quote from him, I really hear his radical honesty about himself, that he enjoys teaching others, but only for fame and profit. And I'm grateful that I can access these teachings because they jolt me out of my own kind of trance just as Ralph jolted me out of my trance. The Shinran quote really did the same job as Ralph's wanting me to play with him. It took me out of that preoccupation with propping myself up or being seen a certain way.

And then I found a second quote, which beautifully bookended an experience that I often have when I encounter this kind of teaching. I'll read you the quote and then I'll talk about the three-stage process that I went through. This is Shinran speaking about *Amida Buddha*, also known as *Amitabha Buddha*, the Buddha that we're in relationship with as Pure Land Buddhists, or the Buddha of infinite light. We can see light as exemplifying compassion. We often say here in this temple that Amida accepts us just as we are, they're the Buddha of all acceptance. When Shinran speaks about Amida, I love the feeling that I get from his words, which matches my own feeling of real loving relationships, something that's true. Here's the second quote:

“The light of compassion illumines us from afar;
Those beings it reaches, it is taught,
Attain the joy of dharma,
So take refuge in Amida, the great consolation.”

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And as I live in that quote, tears come to my eyes because it becomes real inside me. I have been lucky enough to have a taste of what Shinran's speaking about. I particularly love that word "consolation." Again, I don't think it's often used in Buddhist circles. But for me, spiritual life is about finding consolation. It's about finding that steady place where we can be soothed and where we feel like we're accepted in order to go forth and do the things we need to do in the world, face the things we need to face.

The three stages of the process of coming back to—I was going to say coming back to myself but it's the opposite of that, it's coming back to the Buddha—the first bit is getting into a tangle. And when I was searching for the perfect quote, I was getting more and more into a tangle waiting for something that would bring me the solution to my nervousness or to my greed for fame. That's often a very unconscious thing, being in the tangle. We don't really know that we're in the tangle, then there might be some little signs, but we're looking through the eyes of the tangle.

The second bit is waking up. It's waking up to my foolish nature. And the quote where Shinran spoke about lacking even small love or small compassion, acted in that way. That moment is the sinking feeling where we suddenly see something about how... ridiculous we are. I'm laughing as I say that because there's something about the depth of acknowledgement of the ridiculousness or the foolishness that can be very deep. But it's not shame. It's not a feeling of, "I'm a terrible person." I always imagine a wry smile on the Buddha's face. When I think about being seen in this way or seeing myself in this way it's like "Oh, yeah, she's doing that thing again, bless her." That's the kind of feeling I get myself.

Then this opportunity, this moment of recognition of our layers of self-protection then provides the opportunity to remember that we are limited beings, and we have access to unlimited love. Different people from different traditions have different words for this. Buddhists have the word Buddha, which means awakened one. And as Pure Land Buddhists, we especially form a connection with Amitabha Buddha. This is where an opening becomes possible and Amitaba's light can enter us. It's a grace. Again, as I say that tears come to my eyes, because it's unasked for. It's unearned and it is wonderful. It is a wonderful thing to get a taste of. I get an experience of that, and I take refuge in Amida and I feel the great consolation. Then maybe 30 seconds later, or maybe five minutes if I'm lucky, I'm back in the tangle again. That's how it is to be alive.

The good news is there's often a little dog that will come and ask you to play, or there's a teacher who acknowledges their own foolishness, or there's a black bird singing, or a piece of toast popping up from the toaster. Everything around us has the opportunity and the capacity to appear

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in the form of the Buddha. The Buddha appears in many different forms. And Ralph was bringing me the Buddha at that moment.

I think that might be all I want to say. But I do have an invitation for you if you would like to accept it. You might want to experiment, especially if you haven't already, with the practice of Pure Land Buddhists throughout the world, which is *nembutsu*. As Pure Land Buddhists, one of the things that I love about Pure Land Buddhism is the simplicity of it. There's a complicated backstory which I don't need to go into because all you need to know is that Amitabha Buddha has our back, that's the beginning and the end of it. We can connect with that, we can have that experience of refuge or of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned by saying the name of Amida, by calling out to Amida.

The *nembustu*, which means remembering the Buddha, is when we recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. It's a practice that's available to anybody, you don't have to have any time, you don't have to be an academic. It doesn't matter if you're living a virtuous life or not. The idea is that everybody can be taken into Amitabha's arms and have an experience of that consolation. Different people will say the nembutsu in different ways. The way we say it in the Bright Earth School is "Namo Amida Bu," a slightly Anglicized form of the Japanese. Namo means "I call out to," or "I take refuge in," sometimes I think of it as little me, like little me calling out. Amida is Amida Buddha, and Bu is short for butsu, which is the Japanese word for Buddha. So "Namo Amida Bu," that's the nembutsu. My invitation is that you just say it once a day for a week and see what happens. Maybe say it as you bow to your shrine, if you have a shrine, or you can bow to the sun or some object that connects you with something bigger.

You might want to remember your foolishness as you say the words. But the great thing about Pure Land Buddhism is that you don't even have to worry about that. All you need to do is say the name of the Buddha and the Buddha will receive you and all will be assured. Everything will be OK. That doesn't mean that everything gets fixed, of course, and life is still difficult. But there is this sense behind everything that you are standing on firm ground or that you are seen and known and loved, which makes everything else easier. It's very difficult to describe these things. The best thing is for you to have a go and see how it feels. "Namo Amida Bu."

Thank you so much for listening to me! Pure Land Buddhists say "Namo Amida Bu" on many different occasions, like when we drop something or when we see someone or before we eat. It's also a way of saying thank you. It's a way of saying please and a way of saying thank you. So, I will finish by saying Namo Amida Bu.

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