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us regardless of our blind passions. We have only
to awaken to its truth-reality working in our lives.

The Essentials of Jodo Shinshu clearly outlines our
religious creed. Let us be mindful of this passage as
we experience both the joys and the challenges of
our daily lives:

As Jodo Shinshu Buddhists, we shall seek to be
mindful of our words and deeds, be responsible
citizens of our society, and share with others the
truth and reality of Jodo Shinshu. Understanding
fully the principle of causality, we shall not prac-
tice petitionary prayer or magic, nor shall we rely
upon astrology or other superstitions.

Wishes, Hopes and Prayers

Rev. Fumiaki Usuki
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*Amida Buddha is neither a god
nor a deity to whom one can pray.*

*Instead, it is Immeasurable
Wisdom and Compassion
that pervades all life and is
present for us regardless of
our blind passions.*

Wishes, Hopes and Prayers

Rain falls, winds blow, plants bloom, leaves mature and are blown away. These phenomena are all interrelated with causes and conditions, and are brought about by them, and disappear as the causes and conditions change.

Blossoms come about because of a series of conditions that lead up to their blooming. Leaves are blown away because a series of conditions lead up to it. Blossoms do not appear independently, nor does a leaf fall of itself, out of its season... [The Teachings of the Buddha, 41-42].

When we consider nature and life, this passage makes sense. Nothing happens independently and out of nowhere. If we are walking the path of the Buddha-dharma, we know this to be true. Yet even on a good day, why are we often overwhelmed with thoughts that provoke tension, anxieties, regret, anticipation and other dark feelings that compel us to wish, hope and pray?

Even complaining about the traffic, bemoaning the cost of groceries, or hoping for better weather can represent deeper anxieties you may not easily recognize. Despite the many wonderful moments in life, most people still wish for only good things to happen. If we are sending personal wishes to other beings, such as in the Metta Prayer of loving-kindness, we are expressing our own intentions and it has nothing to do with calling on the supernatural to intervene.

On the other hand, perhaps we have unthinkingly prayed for some miracle or magic to happen, whether it is for something serious like saving a life, or whether it is for something frivolous, like having

our favorite team win a championship. It is very difficult to be constantly grateful for the life we have and mindful of the teachings of our Jodo Shinshu tradition. In the private confines of our minds, uncontrollable emotions are always causing us to yearn for what we feel we lack. This is the true nature of our existence as outlined to us by Sakyamuni Buddha. It is impossible to find equanimity when we fail to be aware of our craving and attachment that naturally derive from our senses. When such tension arises in us, we may in our discomfort instinctively reach out for a way to appease our grasping, even if that way is neither reliable nor realistic.

This is not limited to adults for, as children, most of us can remember reacting despondently or at least wistfully about something denied or dreams thwarted. No matter our age, we may find ourselves reverting to wishful thinking, especially as our society and the media are constantly telling us that we can have it all if we want it enough. In such a fantasy, it's no wonder that wishes, hopes, and prayers seem so normal.

Acknowledging that we live in a Christian-dominated

society, it is easy to understand why petitionary prayer and supplication is common. As Buddhists, we are not immune to such influences if we do not truly understand our teaching.

According to the principles of karma and interdependence, everything comes about due to a concurrence of interrelated causes and conditions, as in the following:

**When this exists, that comes to be
With the arising of this, that arises
When this does not exist, that does not come to be
With the cessation of this, that ceases.**

In other words, no amount of wishing, hoping, or praying is going to change the circumstances if the causes and conditions do not exist.

The practice of the Buddha-dharma has evolved and changed in a multitude of ways since Sakyamuni Buddha (566 B.C.E.) first shared it. Since Buddhism is a teaching and religion that offers a path to relief from our *dukkha* (dissatisfaction, frustration, discontent, suffering, sense of dis-ease), some traditions have found it opportune to encourage prayer as a basis of their Buddhist practice. Some also reach out to the metaphysical and supernatural. Pure Land Buddhist sects, too, vary with regard to rituals and practices. However, Jodo Shinshu Buddhists do not practice petitionary prayer, nor do we need good luck rituals or charms. Amida Buddha is neither a god nor a deity to whom one can pray. Instead, it is Immeasurable Wisdom and Compassion that pervades all life and is present for